

Halloween: A Dark Reality

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Summary: Michael Myers and Karen Miller meet during one of the darkest days in the girl's young life, forging a special bond between them. 9 yrs. later, Karen allows Michael to seal that bond, leading her to the truth about her father. In order to save herself and preserve Michael's identity as being Haddonfield's only Boogeyman, Karen must confront her past and face a very dark reality.

1. October 18, 1979

Halloween: A Dark Reality

****Disclaimer: ****I do not own any of the characters, places, or events that originated from ANY of the Halloween films.

****Author's Notes: ****This Halloween story is based on events that occurred during the series John Carpenter began. This story follows the timelines in Halloween, Halloween II, Halloween: H20, and Halloween: Resurrection. The events in Halloween: The Return of Michael Myers, Halloween: The Revenge of Michael Myers, and Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers have been excluded.

****This story is rated M because of language, child abuse; violence; and explicit sexual content, including: rape, incest, and consensual sex. Because of these adult themes, please use discretion before reading**.**

****Summary: ****The evil known as Michael Myers entered the world on October 19, 1957 in the small town of Haddonfield, Illinois. On October 31, 1963, at the age of six, Michael fulfilled his destiny of becoming the Boogeyman by stabbing his seventeen-year-old sister to death. Exactly fifteen years later, he cemented the role while trying to kill his younger sister Laurie Strode. Because of the carnage he left behind that night, residents of Haddonfield learned to fear him. However, all that changes for Michael when Fate guides a young girl named Karen Miller to him.

Karen Miller is only a child of eight when she encounters Haddonfield's notorious Boogeyman Michael Myers for the first time. The horrific circumstances surrounding their encounter inevitably forge a special bond between them. Nine years after their first and only meeting, Karen willingly allows Michael to seal that bond, which leads her to discover the terrifying truth about her father. In order to save herself and preserve Michael's identity as being Haddonfield's only Boogeyman, Karen must confront her past and face a very dark reality.

* * *

><p>Brookside, Illinois

October 18, 1979

Holly Miller gazed up at her husband with love shining brightly in her clear blue eyes. David Miller's gaze, however, remained focus on their newborn baby girl. Little Karen Miller lay sleeping in her mother's arms, completely unaware of the pair of sepia eyes staring at her.

"She looks just like you, David," Holly told him.

He wordlessly nodded.

An expression of concern crossed her face. "I know how much you wanted a boy. You're not too disappointed, are you?" she asked.

"Don't be silly, Holly," David answered. "It will be nice having a girl. Boys tend to get into too much trouble, anyway."

His remark made the young woman smile.

"So, have you given any more thought to moving?"

The soft smile on her lips instantly dissolved into a frown. "Yes, and I still don't think it's a good idea."

"Holly, it will be good for us. I'll be making more money, so you'll be able to stay at home and take care of the baby."

She sighed. "If it was anywhere but Haddonfield, I would be all for it."

David shook his head in irritation, which slightly ruffled his coffee-colored hair. "Holly, you can't let your fear of what happened there last year control your life."

"But people were brutally killed in that town, David," she said, "including the sheriff's daughter. I would die if something like that happened to Karen."

David reached out and tucked a few strands of his wife's light brown hair back behind her ear. "I promise I won't ever let the Boogeyman touch our daughter," he solemnly replied. "I will keep her safe."

Holly looked down at her precious girl and said, "All right, David, we can go, but you'd better be sure never to break that promise."

"Don't worry, Holly, I won't," David swore. "You can count on it."

2. October 17, 1984

****FIVE YEARS LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****October 17, 1984****

Holly handed her nearly five-year-old daughter a small wrapped box. Both wonderment and excitement shone brightly in Karen's deep brown eyes as she gave the present a gentle shake. Holly chuckled. "Go ahead and open it, sweetie," she encouraged.

Karen instantly met her gaze. "But my birthday isn't until tomorrow."

"I know, but I want you to have this gift now."

Smiling, the young brunette girl ripped off the wrapping paper, revealing a small jewelry box. She opened the lid and gasped. Inside laid a small gold cross with a colorful opal embedded in its center. "Wow," she breathed. "It's so pretty."

"It's a necklace," Holly said. She pulled a silver chain out from underneath her light blue sweater. Connected to the chain hung platinum cross. Instead of an opal, a sapphire sparkled within its center. "It's just like mine. See?"

Karen threw her arms around Holly's neck in a tight hug. "It's the best present ever!" she proclaimed. "I love you, Mommy."

The woman smiled, gladly returning the affectionate embrace. "I love you, too, Karen, and happy birthday."

3. September 25, 1987

****THREE YEARS LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****September 25, 1987****

Holly sat on the floor of the bedroom she shared with her husband. An old shoebox lay next to her on its side. It had slipped off one of the shelves in the closet, and now she was staring at its contents with a horrified expression of her face.

She startled hard when she heard someone enter the house. She quickly gathered up the items, which were spread out in front of her, and stacked them back into the box. Holly then rose to her feet, returned the box to its original place, and grabbed her laundry basket. She

was able to take a couple of calming breaths before the bedroom door opened, revealing her husband's tall muscular form. His body was clad in his cop uniform, signaling that he was still on duty.

David silently stepped into the room. His dark eyes shifted from Holly to the open closet door. "What are you doing?" he asked.

She gestured to the laundry basket and said, "Putting our clothes away."

David's intense gaze landed on the floor. He strode passed his wife and picked up a photograph she had missed seeing. Holly felt the color drain from her face as he stared at the picture in his hand. Then, without warning, he lunged at her. The laundry basket fell to the floor as she desperately tried to free his hands from her neck. She struggled against him but to no avail. The room turned dark, and then there was nothing.

4. October 30, 1987

****Author's Warning: This chapter contains adult content and themes.****

* * *

><p>ONE MONTH LATER

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****October 30, 1987****

Karen Miller sat at her desk in school with a book laid open in front of her. Since it was Friday, her teacher Mrs. Hekman had decided to give the class time to finish their homework before school let out for the day. The young brunette girl had already completed her various assignments, so she was now doing some recreational reading—or at least that was the illusion she was portraying.

Karen's mind restlessly drifted from the words on the page to the upcoming holiday. Tomorrow was Halloween. Her parents never allowed her to partake in Halloween activities due to their paranoia that something bad might happen to her. They did their best to shelter her from the horrors that rested in Haddonfield's past, but she knew all about the Boogeyman, Michael Myers. He had killed a lot of people on Halloween a year before her birth, though he had not been seen since. For that reason alone, most of the kids in her class were allowed to dress up and go Trick or Treating. In fact, a majority of them had come to school dressed up in their costumes. Karen would have loved to be a witch, or a princess, or a clown. However, as it happened, she was dressed in simple jeans and a violet sweater.

The bell rang, signaling the beginning of the weekend. While her classmates scurried out of the room, the brunette lingered behind and carefully put her book and Trapper Keeper into her sky blue backpack. Mrs. Hekman offered her a soft smile.

"You did really well on you English assignment today," she said.

"I like to write," Karen replied.

"Yes, and read," her teacher pointed out.

The girl nodded.

"I know it's been hard for you since your mother left. If you ever need someone to talk to, come and see me, okay?"

Karen wordlessly gave her head a sharp nod. A month had passed since her mother's sudden departure from Haddonfield. According to her father, her mother had run off with another man. Because her father was so well-respected within the community, no one questioned his story. Karen had tried prying more answers from him right after he had told her the heartbreaking news, but he had responded by yelling at her, saying that she wasn't the only person her mother had hurt. His anger had scared Karen enough not to broach the subject again.

Sighing softly, she slung her backpack over her shoulder and quickly left the classroom. As the brunette walked down the quiet hallway, she absently touched her cross pendant through the material of her sweater. The necklace was the only token she had left to remind her of her mother. Everything else had already been disposed of.

Karen pushed a large steel door open and then stepped outside into the fresh air and sunshine. Her father's patrol car was parked out front, waiting for her. She hastily stepped into the vehicle and strapped on her seat belt.

"How was school?" her father asked.

"It was fine," replied Karen. "Mrs. Hekman really liked my English paper."

Her father patted her knee. "That's great, princess," he said.

She gave him a tentative look. "Daddy, may I go Trick or Treating tomorrow night?"

He immediately shook his head as he pulled out of the school's parking lot. "You know the rules, Karen," he said.

Her heart sank. "I just thought that since Mom's goneâ€"

"The rules still haven't changed," her father sternly interrupted. More gently he said, "But I do have some place special I want to take you."

This made Karen smile. "You do?"

Her father nodded.

"Where?"

He gave her a sideways glance and said, "You'll see."

Karen stared out the window as they traveled towards Haddonfield Park. Instead of driving through the park's entrance, her father turned down a desolate dirt road. The farther away they traveled from

the park, the more her anxiety rose. She wanted to know where he was taking her. He drove down the bumpy road until it dead ended. Then, he parked the car and looked at her.

"So, what do you think?"

Karen gazed out the windshield. The trees surrounding them had mostly changed into their fall colors of reds, yellows, and oranges. Against the pure blue sky they looked radiant. "It's very pretty," she finally declared.

"Just like you," answered her father.

There was a certain gleam in his dark eyes that sent chills down the girl's spine. Her hand automatically reached for the door handle.

"Princess, please don't run from me," he said.

Karen ignored him and tried to open the car door. It was, of course, locked. As she reached to unlock it, her father grabbed a handful of her brown locks. She gasped in pain, but it did not stop her from pulling up on the lock. However, it did prevent her from leaving the car. "Daddy, stop," she begged. "You're hurting me."

"I'll only let you go if you promise to stay in the car with me."

A plan suddenly formed in Karen's mind; she just prayed it would work. She moved her hand away from the door and said, "Okay, Daddy, I promise."

His grip immediately slackened. "That's a good girl. I never wanted to hurt you, Karen. I love you so much." He moved his hand to her cheek. "Now it's important for you to keep this between you and me, all right?"

Karen mutely nodded, feeling more frightened than ever. She stayed very still as her father pressed his lips firmly to her mouth. Being only eight years old, she had never been kissed before—at least not in the manner he was kissing her. Her heart was beating rapidly, yet somehow she was able to remain calm. She slowly inched her fingers back to the door handle. Her father was too lost in the moment to take notice of her actions. When his hands started to touch her, she kicked him hard in the stomach. He withdrew from her just long enough for her to swing the car door open. She fell backwards out of the vehicle.

Her father quickly reacted. He slid across the front seat and caught Karen's ankle before she could slam the door closed. He forced himself onto her, trapping her underneath his heavy body. He hastily found the zipper of her jeans all the while whispering that he loved her. When she opened her mouth to scream for help, he covered it with his. He kissed her so deeply it made her gag. After a long moment, he raised his lips from hers.

"That was just a warning, Karen," he said. "Don't scream."

She remained quiet and submissive as her father took from her what he wanted. Silent tears of helplessness and pain rolled down her cheeks. He never even bothered to brush them away.

Afterwards, the cop stood up and nonchalantly readjusted his clothing. Karen stayed on the ground as he walked back to his patrol car. He grabbed a small paper bag from the glove box. Then, he returned to her and knelt down between her legs. Using the contents inside the bag, he thoroughly cleaned her.

As he helped her redress, Karen became acutely aware of what her father had done to her. The instant he rose to his full height, she scrambled to her feet. Not knowing what else to do or where else to go, she took off running into the woods.

* * *

><p>The Shape plunged the blade of his kitchen knife deep into the flesh of his latest victim, a large red fox. Although he always took pleasure in killing, he had slain the fox out of necessity. It was finally time for him to eat.<p>

He reached behind his head and pulled his white expressionless mask from his face. The Boogeyman rarely unmasked, but in this matter he had no choice. He set the mask down next to him. Then, he feasted upon the fox's dead body. Within minutes, all that remained of the animal was its fur and bones. Everything else was now slowly digesting in Michael Myers' stomach.

Grabbing his mask and knife, he rose to his feet. He walked over to the edge of a nearby pond. He crouched down and rinsed the fox's blood off his hands, blade, and face. He shook his weapon dry. He then slid it back into one of the side pockets of his signature navy blue coveralls.

The sound of crunching leaves suddenly caught Michael's attention. Somebody was approaching his location. Without taking time to remask, he moved away from the pond. He stood amongst the shadows of the trees while he watched for the intruder. To his surprise, a young brunette girl emerged from a thicket of trees opposite of him. Her cheeks were very flushed, and she looked visibly shaken. Attacking children had never interested the killer, but he knew there were men out there who enjoyed preying on the innocent. Judging by the girl's swollen lips, she had encountered such a man.

Michael's stomach churned at the thought of someone so young being subjected to that type of treatment. Despite his own apparent lack of morals, he strongly believed the act of sex should only take place between two consenting adults. He, himself, had never felt inclined to participate in such behavior due to the fact that his desire to kill had always overpowered his need for female companionship. Still, he often wondered what it would be like to have a woman to call his own.

The girl lowered herself to the ground and drew her legs up close to her chest. She scanned her surroundings. When her gaze landed in his direction, a perplexed expression appeared on her face. She knew she was being watched. Michael remained very still as her deep brown eyes searched for him. After a few minutes, she admitted defeat. She rested her forehead against her kneecaps. Soon, her quiet sobs filled the air.

Michael decided to use her distressed state to his advantage. He

slipped his mask over his face, becoming the Shape once again. He stepped into the open and silently approached the girl. He stopped within mere feet of her. Seconds later, she stirred. Knowing he was growing short on time, the Shape retreated up a narrow dirt path where he vanished from sight.

* * *

><p>Karen sensed someone standing near her. She raised her head. Her eyes widened by what she saw. A set of boot prints were clearly visible in the earth directly in front of her. The impressions were too large to be her father's, and considering how close the stranger had been to her, she doubted he meant her any harm. In fact, it seemed as though the person had purposely left the prints behind as a trail for her to follow.<p>

The young girl stood up. She wasn't too keen on trusting a complete stranger to help guide her out of the woods, yet staying out all night held little appeal to her either. Besides that, she had to tell someone about what her father had done. Otherwise, there would be nothing stopping him from doing it again.

Karen took a determined step forward, and then another, and then another. Before she realized it, she was walking along the trail laid out for her. She followed the narrow path until it forked off in two directions. She looked at the ground for further instruction only to find that there was none. As far as she could tell, the person had just disappeared. No, he was still there. She could feel his eyes watching her, just like she had earlier down by the pond.

A twig suddenly snapped from within a patch of trees off to the brunette's left. Apparently, the stranger had been waiting to see if she would indeed follow him before offering her any more guidance. She headed towards area where the sound had come from. She didn't see anyone, but next to the path lay a broken stick. She picked it up. The bark covering it was still warm to the touch. Her heart began to race. How could she not have seen the person when he had been here just moments before?

The sound of children's laughter interrupted Karen's thoughts. She gently set the stick down and continued up the path. The trail ended near the playground in Haddonfield Park. She stopped at the edge of the forest and looked for her father. He was nowhere to be seen. Staying within the tree line, she walked to the park's entrance. From there she decided to go to her teacher's house. Karen felt certain Mrs. Hekman would be able to help her.

* * *

><p>The Shape followed the girl, determined to keep a vigil on her. He could have easily parted ways with her at the park and gone back to his house on Lampkin Lane, but he wanted to make sure she reached her destination without further incident. The fact he was taking such precautions would shock anyone who knew him. Hell, even he was having a difficult time understanding the reason behind this uncharacteristic good deed. In all reality, he should not have been concerned for the girl's safety, young or not. He was a heartless being whose only purpose for existing was to kill. He didn't give a damn about anyone, his own family members included, so what made this girl so different?<p>

The answer was really quite simple. She wasn't his victim; therefore, he was not the one whom she feared. She trusted him. That alone made her unique from all the others. The Shape drew in a deep breath and slowly let it out. Fate could have guided her anywhere, yet it had led her directly to him. This could only mean one thingâ€”she was destined to be his.

He watched the girl slowly approach a modest red brick house. She opened the front gate and walked up to the porch. She rang the bell. The Shape frowned beneath his mask when he realized that this was not her residence. _Why would she have come here instead of going home?_ he wondered. Perhaps, she was scared to face her parents, or, perhaps, they were away. _Or, perhaps, she doesn't want a stranger finding out where she lives_, he thought wryly.

The front door suddenly opened, diverting his rampant thoughts. A woman with sandy-blond hair and dark blue eyes greeted the girl. "Karen?" the woman asked, obviously surprised. "What are you doing here?"

The girl remained silent, and the Shape could see she was fighting to keep her composure.

A look of apprehension appeared on the woman's face. "Would you like to come inside?"

The girl wordlessly nodded.

The woman stepped aside, allowing the girl entry into the house. The girl hesitated in the doorway and stole one last glimpse in the Shape's direction. This time he did not attempt to conceal himself from her. Her brown eyes widened. Then, to his astonishment, she took a small step towards him. Her reaction proved that a bond had indeed been forged between them.

"Karenâ€”?"

The woman's voice distracted the girl just long enough for the Shape to leave unnoticed. The girlâ€”Karenâ€”was much too young to understand what had transpired between them. Once she grew older, he knew it would become clear to her. His only choice now was to wait for that day to come.

* * *

><p>Karen didn't have to look behind her to see that the Boogeyman was gone. Mrs. Hekman truly was the only one who could help her now. With a sigh of resignation, the brunette walked into the house. She sat down on an over-stuffed chair in the living room. Her teacher joined her a few minutes later carrying a tall glass of water.<p>

"I thought you might be thirsty," Mrs. Hekman said.

Karen nodded and politely accepted the glass.

"So what brings you here?"

The girl took a sip of water. The cool liquid barely slipped past the lump, which had formed in her throat. Tears stung her eyes, and

before she realized it, she was crying, again.

Mrs. Hekman instantly knelt down in front of her. "Did someone hurt you?" she asked, her voice gentle.

"Y-yes," Karen quietly replied.

"Was this person a man?"

The younger bit down on her lower lip and nodded.

"Can you tell me who he was?"

Karen was about to open her mouth to speak when she suddenly felt very ashamed of what she had allowed her own father to do to her.

"It's all right, Karen," said Mrs. Hekman, taking the water glass from the girl's hand and setting it on the floor. "You can tell me."

The brunette turned her gaze onto the plush brown carpet and deeply sighed. "It was my father," she finally stated.

"What?" Mrs. Hekman gasped.

Karen's eyes remained focused on the floor. "He didn't take me home after school. He took me to some woods instead. I tried to run away, but he wouldn't let me go."

"Can you tell me what he did to you?"

"He kissed and touched me a lot."

Mrs. Hekman's blue eyes narrowed. "Is that all that he did?"

Karen shook her head and softly said, "No."

Her teacher patted her hand in a feeble attempt to comfort her. "Sometimes when people get mad at someone, they take their anger out on other people. Your father is probably still very sad and angry that your mom left, and that's why he acted the way he did. I'm sure he never meant to hurt you." Mrs. Hekman suddenly rose to her feet and gave Karen a hard look. "Now, I think you should go home before he comes here looking for you."

The brunette girl quickly stood up and walked over to the door, confused by her teacher's sudden change in mood.

"I will not tell your father about this visit," Mrs. Hekman sternly voiced, "and you and I will pretend this conversation never happened. Understand?"

Karen somberly nodded and turned the door handle. Night had fallen over Haddonfield, shrouding everything in darkness. As soon as she stepped onto the porch, she heard the door's lock click into place. Tears of pure anguish rolled down her cheeks. Never in her life had she felt more alone. The only person who wanted her was her father, it seemed. Everyone else had abandoned her. Maybe she had been wrong to run from him. After all, he was the only person who loved

her.

She used the sleeve of her sweater to wipe the tears from her face, and that's when she saw him—"not her father but the Boogeyman. Elated, she ran up to him. The smile on her face quickly faded when she discovered the white object she had seen was nothing more than a plastic ghost dangling from a leafless tree branch. Of course it wasn't the Boogeyman. She couldn't expect him to help her any more than he already had. He was a killer, not a babysitter. She angrily shoved the ghost aside and continued on her journey home.

Karen lived in one of the larger houses in Haddonfield. It stood by itself on the outskirts of a small wooded area. She never realized how isolated it really was until now. She passed her father's patrol car in the driveway as she sauntered up to the front door. She cautiously opened it and peered into the house. The light emitting from the cop's study silhouetted his body standing in the doorway.

"Where the hell have you been?" he asked.

"In the park," Karen vaguely replied. She refused to tell him about the beautiful pond she had found or about Michael Myers.

"You know better than to run off like that, especially this time of year."

The girl bowed her head and stared at the hardwood floor. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to worry you."

Her father walked over to her and raised her chin with his index finger. "And I'm sorry I scared you, princess. I promise I won't do anything like that to you again."

Karen's heart soared. "Really?" she asked.

"Yes, really. Now are you hungry? I was thinking about ordering us a pizza."

She gave her father a shy smile and nodded. "Yes, please."

He dropped his hand to his side. "All right, while I do that, why don't you get ready for bed?"

"Okay, Daddy. I'll be back down in a few minutes."

At his nod of approval, Karen hurried upstairs to her bedroom. She dressed into her night clothes. She then threw her jeans and sweater into the hamper and sat down on her bed. She still didn't trust her father. Maybe she never would. He may not have meant to hurt her, but in the end, he had. She didn't know if she could ever forgive him for that.

The brunette sighed. As much as she wanted to stay in her room, she knew her father was expecting her downstairs. She rose to her feet and left to return to him. He smiled at her when she entered the family room. He was sitting on the sofa, and the television was on.

"I thought we could watch a movie while we eat," he said.

"Sure," the younger answered. She moved to sit in a recliner.

"Karen, please don't be scared of me," he pleaded, gesturing to the cushion next to his. "Here, this is for you." He handed her an opened can of cola.

"You usually don't let me drink pop," she reminded him.

"Think of it as a peace offering."

The girl took the can and sat down on the sofa.

"There, see, this isn't so bad, is it?"

She shook her head as she began drinking her soda. It had a strange flavor to it, but she didn't dare say anything about it to her father. She didn't wish to spoil his good mood.

Karen had just about finished her special treat when the doorbell rang.

"That must be the pizza," the cop stated. "I'll be right back."

She nodded, suddenly starting to feel really sleepy. The young girl laid her head on the arm of the sofa and closed her eyes.

"Are you feeling all right?" her father questioned upon coming back into the room.

"Tired," she said.

He touched her cheek with the backside of her fingers. "Well, you've had a busy day."

Karen's head began to turn fuzzy, and she found she couldn't keep her thoughts straight. The last thing she remembered was feeling her father's lips on her forehead. Everything after that remained a black void in her mind.

5. December 4, 1987

****Author's Warning: This chapter contains adult content.****

* * *

><p>ONE MONTH LATER

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****December 4, 1987****

Karen laid on her bed in the darkness. A figure with a pale face knelt down next to her. She blinked a couple of times to clear her vision, but her eyesight remained blurry. The face reminded her of Michael Myers' mask. Even though she had only seen it once, the image had stayed with her. Was this person the masked killer? If so, why was he here?

"_Relax, Karen," the figure said. "I'm not going to hurt you."_

_The voice was definitely male. It sounded muffled in her ears, as though the man was speaking through a mask. Yes, this had to be Michael Myers. He hadn't hurt her before, so there was no reason to think he would harm her now. But when his hands started to touch her, she instinctively moved away from him. _

"_There's no need to be scared," he told her. "This won't be like last time, I promise."_

_Michael reached down underneath Karen's pajama pants and panties. He gently touched the area between her legs, making her feel really good. Was it bad for her to like this, to want even more? Before she could decide on an answer, he hooked his fingers around the waistband of her pants and underwear and pulled them down. Then, he climbed over her. Pleasure quickly replaced fear as he joined their bodies together. Soon, she began to tremble underneath him. _

"_Yes, Karen, enjoy it," encouraged Michael as his movements became harsher and more demanding. She clung to him while the world spun around her. Finally, he shuddered hard and then collapsed against her. Her eyelids then fluttered closed. She fell sound asleep with him still embedded deep within her. _

* * *

><p>"Karen, wake up. You're going to be late for school."<p>

Upon hearing her father's stern voice, the girl opened her eyes. He loomed over her, already dressed for work. She quickly sat up and slid off the bed. His gaze followed her to her dresser as she chose her clothes for the day (jeans and a pink sweatshirt), but then he left her bedroom, allowing her to change in privacy.

Karen undressed, frowning when she discovered a mysterious wet spot on the inside of her panties. She didn't want to ask her father about it, so she just tossed them into her hamper and continued getting ready for school.

Once finished, the brunette hurried downstairs. Her father was waiting for her at the front door. She slipped on her blue winter coat. Then, he handed her a packed lunch and guided her to his black Honda Civic. She felt his eyes on her as she latched her safety belt.

"Princess, what's wrong?"

She met his stare. "Nothing," she said.

"No, something's bothering you. I can tell."

The young girl sighed. "I'm just tired, Daddy. I didn't sleep well last night."

Her father pulled out of the car out of the driveway. "Did you have a bad dream?" he asked.

"I can't remember," she replied, though her dream about Michael Myers

remained fresh in her mind.

The cop nodded. "I'm sorry, princess, but maybe tonight you'll sleep better."

"I hope so."

Her father didn't speak again until they reached the elementary school. "Have a good day, Karen."

She stepped out of the car. "Bye, Daddy."

Karen rushed into the building just as the bell rang. She entered her classroom with the rest of her classmates and sat down at her desk. Mrs. Hekman greeted everyone but her with a cheerful smile. The young girl suddenly wished she hadn't gone to her teacher's house that evening after the attack. If she would have just kept quiet, Mrs. Hekman would still smile and talk to her like she did with every other student. The brunette missed that.

The day crept by. When school finally let out, Karen began her trek home, which seemed longer than usual because she felt so tired. She hoped she wouldn't dream again tonight, especially about Michael Myers. She didn't think having such dreams about a man she barely knew was appropriate for someone of her age. It just seemed wrong.

Karen unlocked the front door, shrugged out of her coat, and walked to the kitchen table where she always did her homework. After solving her last math problem, she headed upstairs to take a short nap before her father got home from work. She snuggled underneath her rose pink comforter. With no one around to bother her, she quickly found sleep.

6. July 25, 1992

****FIVE YEARS LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****July 25, 1992****

"I bet the killer's hiding in the closet."

Karen briefly turned her eyes away from the television screen in order to give her best friend Dawn a sideways glance. Dawn anxiously twisted a tendril of her platinum blonde hair around her index finger while her cornflower blue eyes remained glued to the movie.

"No, I think he's waiting for her in the bathroom," Karen said.

Both girls sat on the edge of the couch, waiting for the killer to strike when the screen suddenly went dark.

"Hey!" Dawn exclaimed.

"I don't think that's an appropriate movie for you two to be watching," Dawn's mother Johanna Johnson gently reprimanded. "It's a gorgeous evening," she continued, setting the T.V. remote down on an

in-table. "Why don't you go outside and play?"

Dawn and Karen quickly obeyed Mrs. Johnson and left the confines of the house. They chased fireflies around the front yard for a while before plopping down on the grass. Together, they watched a teenage boy across the street help his parents unload a trunk full of groceries from their blue minivan. He paused on his way to the front door, turned his head, and winked at the two girls. Dawn giggled.

"He's soooo cute," she cooed. "I dream about him a lot."

Dawn's statement made Karen wonder if the dreams she still had about Michael Myers were not as abnormal as she first thought.

The blonde girl gave the brunette a shy look. "Have you ever been kissed by a boy before?"

Karen slowly nodded. "Once."

"Really," Dawn asked with enthusiasm. "Did you like it?"

"No."

Dawn's face fell. "Oh."

The girls turned quiet as the sky darkened around them.

"I'm glad your dad is letting you spend the night," the blonde girl said at last.

"Me, too," Karen replied.

"Do you think we'll be best friends forever?"

The brunette shrugged. "I don't know. Forever is a long time."

"Well, I think we will be." Dawn suddenly stood up. "Come on," she said. "Let's go back inside. I'm starved."

Karen nodded, following her friend into the house. Mrs. Johnson smiled at them as they entered the kitchen.

"All right, you two, what do you want for dinner?"

Dawn didn't hesitate to answer. "Pizza!" she shouted.

Her mother laughed. "Okay, I'll order you girls a pizza, but then it will be time for bed."

Karen sat with Dawn and Mrs. Johnson at the kitchen table. They both were taking bites of their second piece of pizza whereas Karen was still nibbling on her first.

"What's the matter, Karen?" Mrs. Johnson asked, looking at her. "Not hungry?"

The brunette stared down at her plate, embarrassed that the woman had

noticed her lack of appetite. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Johnson," she muttered.

"Don't fret about it. I'll put your piece in the fridge so you can eat it later."

Karen raised her head and smiled. "Thank you."

Just then, Dawn's father walked through the back door. He gave his wife an affectionate kiss, which made his daughter cringe.

"Dad, not in front of Karen," Dawn pleaded.

He simply smiled and ruffled her hair. "So, what did you kids do today?"

Dawn frowned as she patted her hair back down. "Karen and I are not kids any more, Dad. We're almost teenagers."

"I beg your pardon," he teased. "What did you _almost teenagers_ do today?"

Dawn rolled her eyes. "Mom took us shopping. Then, we came home and watched a movie, which she didn't let us finish."

"It was a horror movie," Mrs. Johnson said, responding to Derek Johnson's inquiring gaze. "They don't need to see some deranged killer ripping his victims apart."

"But it's not real," argued Dawn.

"Your mother's right," Mr. Johnson interrupted. "There are plenty of other movies you can watch besides horror. Now, I think it's time for you gals to head to bed. It's getting late."

"Okay, Dad. 'Night."

Dawn hugged and kissed both her parents before leading Karen up to her bedroom. The girls changed into their pajamas. While Dawn climbed into bed, Karen unrolled her sleeping bag and crawled into it.

"Maybe next time I can spend the night at your house," Dawn said into the darkness.

"Maybe," the brunette dully answered. It wasn't her father who kept Dawn from staying over at their house; it was Karen. Because of what he had done to her, Karen feared for her friend's virtue. She didn't want Dawn to suffer the same fate she had. No one deserved that, especially not her best friend.

The bed springs squeaked as Dawn found a more comfortable position to sleep in. "Well, good night, Karen," she yawned. "See you in the morning."

"'Night, Dawn."

Karen closed her eyes. For once, Michael Myers did not plague her dreams.

7. April 8, 1995

****Author's Warning: This chapter contains adult content.****

* * *

><p>THREE YEARS LATER

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****April 8, 1995****

_Karen sat on the edge of her bed, waiting with bated breath for the notorious white masked serial killer to enter her bedroom. Not only had she grown accustomed to his late-night visits, but now she yearned for them as well, and Michael Myers never left her unsatisfied. _

The door slowly opened. Her heart pounded in her ears as he approached the bed. He pushed on her shoulders, forcing her to lie down on the soft mattress. He quickly joined her. She moaned in pleasure while his hands restlessly roamed over her pajama-clad body.

_After a few minutes, he undressed her. Her thighs eagerly opened for him. With a groan, he accepted the wordless invitation. She raised her hips, allowing him to completely fill her. She felt no shame in making love to him. It seemed so natural, as though it was meant to be. _

Afterwards, he held her close. She snuggled into him, enjoying the feel of his warm body next to hers. Eventually, fatigue overpowered her, and she fell asleep still curled up in his arms.

* * *

><p>"You don't like you got much sleep last night," Dawn commented as she and Karen wandered through Haddonfield's main shopping strip.<p>

Mrs. Johnson had dropped the girls off to do some window shopping on her way to visit a sick friend. After being cooped up during the long winter months, Karen was more than happy to spend the afternoon outside with Dawn, though the sudden shift in conversation made her uncomfortable. What the blonde girl didn't know was that Karen hadn't been sleeping well for years on account of her reoccurring dreams about Michael Myers. The brunette refused to tell anyone about these dreams, including her best friend. "I stayed up too late last night studying for our biology test," she answered. "That's all." It wasn't the full truth, but it wasn't a lie either.

Dawn sighed. "Leave it to you to study for a test on a Friday night."

Karen merely shrugged. Studying just gave her an excuse to stay in her bedroom, away from her father. Even though she always received top grades, attending a university outside of Haddonfield remained a pipe dream in her mind. Deep down she knew he would never let her leave the small town.

"Hey," Dawn said, looking at the doors of a nearby hamburger joint, "do you want to grab a snack? My mom gave me some money, so I can treat you. She's afraid you aren't getting enough to eat at home."

"My father does feed me," Karen stated. "I'm just never hungry."

"So is that a no to the snack?"

The brunette shook her head. "I could actually go for some fries."

"Great!" Dawn exclaimed.

As soon as the two teenagers entered the small restaurant, Dawn's childhood crush offered them a timid smile from a nearby booth.

"Hi, Kyle," Karen politely greeted.

"Hey, Karen." The high school senior turned to the pretty blonde.

"Hi, Dawn," he said, blushing. "Would you two like to sit with me?"

"Sure," Dawn answered, not giving the brunette time to object.

Karen sat down next to her friend. They ordered their food and had a pleasant conversation with Kyle. He seemed to be a genuinely nice guy, who was very interested in Dawn.

After they finished eating, they stood up and walked to the register. To the girls' surprise, Kyle picked up the tab.

"You didn't need to do that," Dawn told him as they exited the restaurant. "I had money."

"Hey, I don't often get the chance to treat two pretty ladies," Kyle said, smiling.

Karen returned his smile. "Maybe next time you can treat Dawn to a movie," she suggested. "I'm sure she would like that."

Dawn's face turned bright red. "Karenâ€¦" she hissed.

"It's all right, Dawn," Kyle assured her. "I would really like to take you to movie sometime."

"I would really like that, too," the blonde teenager admitted.

Dawn and Kyle quickly made plans to meet the following Friday night. Then, he and the girls parted ways.

"I owe you one," Dawn told her friend.

"Well, maybe one day you'll get the chance to return the favor," the brunette relied.

"For your sake, I hope so."

Karen nodded. "Yeah," she said, "I hope so, too."

8. October 18, 1996

****ONE YEAR LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****October 18, 1996****

"Happy birthday, Karen!"

The brunette politely smiled at Dawn's enthusiastic greeting.
"Thanks. So, are you ready for school?"

Dawn opened the front door wider. "Almost," she said, taking Karen's arm and pulling her into the house, "but my parents want to see you first. They're in the kitchen."

"Okay?"

Karen wandered into the kitchen. Dawn's parents were sitting at the table. Mrs. Johnson smiled at her while her husband gestured to a chair. The seventeen-year-old wordlessly sat down and patiently waited for someone to speak.

"Karen, Derek and I have a present for you," Mrs. Johnson said. "We wanted to give it to you last year, but the deal fell through at the last minute, and it took us a while to locate another one." She set a small wrapped gift on the table in front of the brunette.

"Go on, open it," Mr. Johnson encouraged.

Karen obeyed and then gasped at what she saw. Inside the box lay a single silver key.

"This is so you can get away from Haddonfield without your father knowing," Dawn's mother explained. "We know he's been stifling you as of late."

"And it's starting to show," Mr. Johnson added, referring to the brunette's thinning figure.

"I appreciate your concern," Karen said. "I really do, but I can't accept this. Besides, I don't even have my license, yet."

"We'll help you get your driver's license, Karen," Mr. Johnson firmly told her. "This will be our little secret. All we ask is that you be responsible with your freedom."

"I will be," the brunette sincerely stated. "I promise."

"So, do you want to see it?" Dawn asked from the doorway.

Karen eagerly nodded.

Everyone walked to the garage. The brunette's dark eyes widened in shock when they landed on a black 1975 Chevy Camaro. "I don't deserve this," she voiced at last.

Mr. Johnson awkwardly smiled at her and said, "Happy birthday, kiddo."

9. August 1, 1997

****Author's Warning: Adult themes and situations are present in this chapter. Also, in this chapter, I make a clear distinction between Michael Myers and the Shape. My intention here is not to defile Michael's character but to add dimension to his persona, especially where Karen is concerned.****

* * *

><p>TEN MONTHS LATER

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****August 1, 1997 ****

A warm breeze blew Karen's long hair in all directions as she cruised down a country road in her Camaro. Just as the Johnsons had promised, she had taken and passed drivers' training without her father's knowledge. The proof showing she was now legal to drive rested in the back pocket of her faded denim shorts.

As she crossed the county line, a deep sense of liberation filled her. She was no longer in her father's jurisdiction, and for the first time ever, she felt free. She continued to drive away from Haddonfield without a particular destination in mind. She had promised the Johnsons to be back by dark, but that still gave her a few hours to herself.

Mrs. Johnson once called her father stifling, but her father was much more than that. He controlled every aspect of her life, including who she could be friends with. He had specifically chosen the Johnsons to be her caretakers for two reasons: one, they had a daughter close to Karen's age, and two, Mr. Johnson worked with her father on the police force.

Karen couldn't gripe about the arrangement. The Johnsons always treated her like their own daughter. Even so, she never found it necessary to tell them about the incident involving her father. Although he never let her date or have any other friends besides Dawn, what he had done to her was just water under the bridge at this point. He hadn't laid a hand on her since that fateful day, upholding the promise he had made her that same night. However, his jealous behavior towards her often made her wonder if he still harbored feelings for her. That nagging thought is what kept her from fully trusting him.

The seventeen-year-old drummed her fingers on the steering wheel and sighed. Only two outside sources knew about the rape. The first being her third grade teacher; the second being Michael Myers. Even though Haddonfield's Boogeyman hadn't helped remedy the situation with her father, their brief encounter had left a lasting impact on her. He was the only man she desired to be with. Unfortunately, he was a known serial killer and although he hadn't shown any signs of wanting to kill her in the past, she doubted he would ever reciprocate her feelings. That's why she always stayed away from the park and Lampkin

Lane, especially near Halloween. She didn't want to tempt Fate a second time. She figured living with unfulfilled desire was better than not living at all.

Karen glanced up at the late afternoon sky and decided it was time to head back to Haddonfield. She pulled into an abandoned farm, planning to turn around when a car parked in the waist-high weeds caught her eye. The tire tracks looked fresh, which caused her to think the driver had some kind of car trouble. She parked her Camaro next to the green 1970s Buick. She stepped out of her vehicle and cautiously approached the barn's entrance. She peered into the darkness. Suddenly, a familiar presence enveloped her. Her heart leapt as a shadow in front of her slowly dissolved into the form of a tall man. His pale handsome face glowed white in the dim light, reminiscent of the mask that haunted her dreams. "Michael?" she breathed.

The man deliberately nodded but otherwise remained motionless.

Karen's eyes wandered to the large kitchen knife gripped tightly in Michael Myers' hand. The color drained from her face when she saw a dark liquid steadily dripping from the knife's silver blade. Michael raised the weapon, which caused her to take a step backwards. Yet instead of mounting an attack, he nonchalantly gestured to a dark corner of the barn.

Reckless curiosity took hold of the teenager. She slowly crossed the barn, keeping a wide girth between her and the notorious killer. Her eyes widened in both shock and relief. A body of a large animal lay unmoving in a small pile of blood-soaked hay. "A dog?" she asked, turning to face Michael, who, to her surprise, was now standing directly behind her. Desire quickly consumed her entire being as their eyes met. She ached for him in a way she couldn't explain, making running impossible.

He carelessly tossed his knife down next to the dead canine and then reached for her. "Karen," he hoarsely murmured.

Without thinking, she dove into his arms, burying her face in his chest. "I need you so much it hurts," she proclaimed into the cloth of his coveralls.

He nuzzled the crown of her head with his lips. "Then let me end your pain," he said, his voice growing stronger with every word he spoke.

Karen raised her face and nodded. The killer's lips instantly crushed hers in a searing kiss that extinguished all her previous fears of him. She clung to him as their tongues dueled. Without breaking their kiss, he guided her down onto the hay-covered floor, positioning himself over her. His hands brazenly explored the skin underneath her clothes. Her fingertips dug into his shoulders as his fingers grazed over her moist center. "Michael!" she gasped when he slid his forefinger into her. He quickly found her magic spot, forcing her to succumb to a powerful orgasm.

He lifted his mouth from hers and trailed feathery kisses over to her ear. He traced her earlobe with the tip of his tongue. She quivered in response and leaned into him. He suddenly withdrew from her. Before she could question his actions, he shed his boots and

coveralls. Her eyes widened upon seeing him in all his glory. "You really are the Boogeyman," she stated, staring at the faint bullet wound scars covering his chest cavity.

Michael crouched down next to her and once again found her ear. "Not to you," he firmly replied.

He gathered Karen in his arms and caressed her out of her all her clothes. A light frown touched his lips as his gaze wandered over her thin frame. She immediately became self-conscious and wished he hadn't undressed her. She then noticed his eyes were lingering on the pendant dangling from her neck. She lightly touched the gold cross. "My mom gave this to me when I little," she softly explained. "She had a silver one similar to it that she always wore."

The killer nodded, showing that he understood the sentiment behind the gift.

Karen returned her hand to her side, wishing she hadn't brought up the painful subject of her mother.

All at once, Michael tilted her chin upward and kissed her full on the mouth. Passion quickly overpowered them both. Together, they laid back down on the floor. They touched and kissed each other until they both yearned for release. Tears formed in Karen's eyes as their bodies merged, becoming one. Never before had she felt so connected with someone. "Michael," she moaned in an attempt to convey her feelings to him.

He responded by pushing his long length farther into her, going deeper with every powerful thrust. She cried out as pain mixed with pleasure. He continued his steady rhythm, showing no signs of relenting. Karen climaxed hard, screaming his name in sweet agony, yet he still did not stop. He tortured her for what felt like hours, bringing her to heights she didn't believe existed.

She was in the midst of experiencing yet another orgasm when Michael finally reached his peak. He subjected her to one last strong thrust that sent them both over the edge. He released his seed deep within her before rolling onto his back, bringing her to rest on top of him. He affectionately petted the back of her head while desperately fought to catch her breath. She then closed her eyes, falling asleep to the sound of his heartbeat.

* * *

><p>Michael continued to hold Karen while she slept, very content to stay with her. He understood her need for him. Ever since the day they met, he felt it, too. However, her tender age had prevented him from claiming her as his lover until now.<p>

He glanced down at her sleeping form. Although he always knew they were destined to be soulmates, Michael never imagined Karen would respond to him the way she had. The intensity of her desire startled him, especially considering her past. Unfortunately, life seemed to have taken its toll on her. He couldn't help but notice how malnourished she looked. During his fifteen year stay in Smith's Grove Sanitarium, he had seen first-hand how patients suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder dealt with their emotional pain. Some had become dependent on drugs and alcohol, while others had resorted

to cutting. However, the most common psychological ailment among them was eating disorders.

In order for Michael to learn whether Karen was purposely harming herself, he would have to spend more time with her. He never made it a point to socialize with anyone, his own psychiatrist Dr. Samuel Loomis included, yet she wasn't just anybody. She was his soulmate. That alone entitled her to certain privileges prohibited to anyone else.

The teenager's eyelashes tickled the killer's chest, telling him she was now awake. She wordlessly slid off of him and began gathering her clothes together. He followed suit, noting that she never once looked at him while they dressed. As she knelt to tie her shoes, he saw that her shoulders were trembling. He silently approached her from behind, dropped to his knees, and pressed his lips against the nape of her neck. "What's wrong, Karen," he gently asked.

She finished tying her shoes and then turned to face him with a perplexed expression on her face. "Michael, Iâ€" She gave her head a slight shake, now looking embarrassed.

"Go on," he insisted.

"Well, it's just that I've been dreaming about being with you for years now but it never felt like this."

"Felt?" the killer asked, confused by Karen's choice of wording.

She nodded. "I know they are nothing more than dreams, but they always feel so real. In fact, at times, I could have sworn you were actually in my bed with me."

Michael stared at his lover, causing her cheeks to heighten in color. "Karen, when did you start having these dreams?" he asked.

Her blush deepened. "About a month after I was attacked."

"And you're sure that you are dreaming about me?"

"Yes," the teenager replied with so much conviction he knew she wasn't lying. "You're the only man I've ever wanted, Michael, but I was scared you wouldn't share my feelings."

"Which is why you have been avoiding me."

"Yes," she said, admitting her guilt.

Michael brushed his knuckles over her warm cheek. "Karen, you're the only person I have ever developed feelings for; therefore, you will always be safe from my rage. Understand?"

She nodded.

"Good."

His lover glanced towards the barn's entrance and sighed. "I have to go, Michael," she told him. "I promised my friend's parents I would be back before dark."

"Very well." He stood up and offered her his hand. She placed her palm in his. He effortlessly pulled her to her feet. Their fingers remained intertwined as they walked out of the barn together.

"So, what were you doing here, anyway?" Karen questioned, breaking the silence that had stretched between them.

Michael's obsidian eyes met hers. "I was waiting for you."

She blinked. "Do you have ESP or something?"

A very faint smile touched the killer's lips. "Or something," he answered.

"Well, I'm glad I found you today," his soulmate confessed as they reached her car.

"So am I."

Her dark eyes searched his for a long moment. Then, she stood on her tiptoes and drew his lips into a soft kiss. It wasn't until she tried to deepen the kiss that Michael finally pushed her away. "Karen, you need to go," he told her. "Otherwise, you won't be in any condition to drive back to your friend's house."

She blushed, obviously catching his meaning.

"Unless," he continued, "you want to stay the night with me."

The teenager's expression suddenly darkened. "I would love to, Michael, but I just can't."

He reached behind her and lifted up on the car's door handle. "In that case, I'll see you later, Karen."

She simply nodded and stepped into her Camaro. As soon as Michael closed the door, his lover started the car and locked it into drive. She stuck her arm out the window and gave him a final wave before pulling out onto the deserted country road. He watched the Camaro until it disappeared from view. Then, he headed back towards the barn where his dinner still lay, waiting to be eaten.

* * *

><p>Karen pulled into the Johnson's driveway just after dark. She quickly parked her car in the garage and wandered into the backyard.<p>

Dawn was sitting on the garden swing, absently rocking it with her feet while staring up at the constellations. "You're late," she lightly scolded, turning her gaze onto her friend. "My mom was getting worried about you."

"I'm really sorry," Karen apologized. "I lost track of the time."

Dawn studied her for a long moment before saying, "Are you all right?"

Karen shrugged. "I honestly don't know."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"It may take a while. I have a lot to tell you."

"I'm not going anywhere," Dawn said.

The brunette joined her friend on the swing and said, "I've met someone."

"Really?" the blonde asked, clearly intrigued by the news. "Is he someone in our class?"

Karen quickly shook her head. "No, he and I met once before when I was eight, and since then, we've both developed feelings for each other."

Dawn's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "After just one meeting?"

Karen wordlessly nodded.

"But you were just a kid."

"Yeah, I know."

Dawn nervously licked her lips. "Was he the one who kissed you?"

Karen gave her head a sound shake. "No, that was somebody else," she darkly replied.

"Does your father know about all this? Is that why he's so overly protective of you?"

Karen scoffed. "Yeah, he knows, and that probably has a lot to do with it."

Dawn looked her friend straight in the eye and asked, "Were you raped?"

A lump formed in Karen's throat and tears stung her eyes, yet she still managed to choke out a reply. "Yes."

The blonde girl threw her arms around the brunette, giving her a tight hug. "I'm so sorry."

Karen laid her head in her friend's shoulder. "Dawn, I'm really scared."

"Of what?"

"Of what my father will do to me once he finds out that I was with a man."

"I don't see how he will find out. I mean, I won't tell him."

Karen gently pushed Dawn away and wiped her eyes. "I know you won't," she said.

"So, are you going to tell me who this new man in your life is?" Dawn

asked.

Karen drew out a long breath. "I will, but you have to promise not to tell a soul."

"I promise," Dawn solemnly swore. "Now, who is he?" A few seconds ticked by. "Karenâ€|?"

"Michael Myers," the brunette murmured.

Dawn's eyes grew as big as saucers. "You're shitting me," she breathed.

"No, I'm not," said Karen. "He and I met just after I was raped."

Dawn remained silent for a few long moments while she gathered her thoughts. Finally, she asked, "Can you be sure that he will never hurt you?"

Karen nodded. "Yes."

The blond teenager sighed. "When are you going to see him again?"

"I don't know."

Dawn gave her friend a shy look. "Do you think he loves you?"

Karen shook her head. "I don't think Michael Myers is capable of loving anybody, do you?"

A frown touched the blonde girl's lips. "No, I guess not, but are you going to be okay with that?"

"Dawn, the man who attacked me told me he loved me and look at what he did. If someone like Michael Myers can show that he at least cares about me, then I'll take that over love any day."

Dawn opened her mouth to say something else when the back door flung open.

"I thought I heard voices out here," Mrs. Johnson said, letting the door close behind her. Her gaze traveled from one girl to the other. "All right, what's going on?" she asked.

"Nothing," Johanna's daughter quickly replied. "We were just talking."

"Right, I wasn't born yesterday, Dawn." The woman studied Karen and said, "Something seems different about you. Are you all right?"

The brunette nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine."

Johanna sighed. "Karen, please don't lie to me. I know there is something going on with you. Is everything okay at home?"

"Everything's fine at home," Karen assured Dawn's mother.

"And yet you look positively drained."

"I'm just tired. Speaking of which," Karen rose to her feet, "I should get going. My father's expecting me home tonight."

"In that case, I'll give you a ride," Mrs. Johnson offered.

"Thanks."

Karen followed Johanna out of the backyard and into the Johnsons' blue Pontiac Grand Prix. Once Mrs. Johnson pulled away from the house, she said, "Karen, for years I have watched your health deteriorate, and I want you to know that if need to get away from your father, I can arrange for you live with my sister. She and her husband own a large estate in Waukegan. I know they would take you in an instant."

Karen stared at her friend's mom in shock. "They would do that for me?"

"Yes. In fact, I could drive you there right now, if you want."

Karen was about to say yes when her thoughts returned to Michael. As much as she wanted to leave Haddonfield, she couldn't leave without talking to him first. Surely, staying one more night with her father wouldn't hurt. "I need some time to think about it," she said at last.

"Yes, of course, Karen, but for your sake, I wouldn't wait too long. I feel the sooner you leave, the better it will be for you."

Johanna pulled into Karen's driveway. The teenager left the car and said, "Thanks for the ride, Mrs. Johnson. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night, Karen."

The brunette nervously walked up to her house. Just as she stepped onto the porch, the front door opened. "I know I'm late," she told her father, not giving him the chance to reprimand her tardiness.

His dark eyes pierced her, and she got the distinct impression he could see the same change in her that Mrs. Johnson had. Instead of saying anything about it, he silently moved out of the doorway, allowing her entry into the house. She wordlessly passed him on her way to the kitchen. A pizza box along with a glass of root beer was sitting on the counter. She grabbed the drink but left the food untouched.

"I really wish you would eat something, princess," her father said. "You're getting much too thin."

"Maybe later, Dad," Karen replied. "Right now, I just want to go upstairs and get ready for bed."

"Have it your way, princess. I'll check on you in awhile."

Karen sauntered up to her bedroom. She sat down at her desk and

exchanged the glass of root beer for her favorite Jane Austen book. She absently took sips of her drink while she lost herself within the fictional lives of Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy.

Two chapters into her reading, her eyesight began to blur, and her mind stopped comprehending the words on the page. Frustrated, Karen laid her novel down next to the half-empty glass of root beer. Her eyes suddenly widened. She stared at the drink and then snatched it from the desk. She had to find Michael.

Her bedroom door instantly creaked open. Her father stood in the threshold, glaring at her. "Going somewhere, princess?" he harshly questioned.

Thinking quickly, Karen moved to her nightstand and placed the glass on the small table top. "No, I was just planning to lie down."

Her father came to stand behind her. Before she could react, he roughly grabbed by the hips and bent her over the edge of her bed. He pushed her face into the mattress with one hand while the other unfastened her shorts. He let them and her panties drop unceremoniously to the floor. Her head started to swim as he touched her bare backside.

"You've been a very bad girl today, princess," he jeered while he unzipped his own pants. "And now it's time to punish you."

Karen screamed in pure agony as her father ruthlessly shoved himself into the hole between her twin mounds, but the mattress muffled the soundâ€"not that anyone was around to hear it, anyway. Just like last time, she was all alone with no one to help her.

"You wouldn't be in so much pain if you would have finished your drink," he said, "but maybe this will teach you not to screw around with other men."

Tears of utter despair soaked Karen's bedding as David Miller violently abused her. By the time he finished, she was barely conscious. He lifted her up onto the mattress where he forced the remainder of the root beer down her throat. Eventually, darkness descended upon her, and she welcomed it with open arms.

10. August 2, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****August 2, 1997****

Dawn woke up to the sound of the telephone ringing. Assuming it was Karen calling, she wandered downstairs to answer it. She entered the family room but stopped short when she noticed the shocked expression on her mother's face.

"Good lord," Johanna gasped, speaking into the phone. "Is she all right?"

There was a long pause during which Dawn asked, "Mom, what

happened?"

Johanna impatiently waved her hand, wordlessly telling the teenager to keep quiet. Dawn sighed and sat down in a chair.

"Yeah, I know," her mother voiced into the receiver. "I should have put two and two together, but I never thought Karen would be one to dabble in that sort of thing. How long has she been using?"

Dawn's brow furrowed in confusion. Surely, they couldn't be talking about her best friend.

"That long? Are you sure?" After a moment's pause, Johanna said, "Well, at least now you know so you can get her some help. Where are you going to take her?"

Dawn stiffened in the chair.

"That should be good for her," her mother stated. "Yeah, I'll let her know." Pause. "All right, but if you need anything, just ask." Another pause. "You, too. Bye, David."

As soon as Johanna hung up the phone, Dawn asked, "Mom, is Karen okay?"

The woman slowly shook her head. "No, sweetie, I'm afraid not. Sheriff Miller just found out that Karen is suffering from drug addiction. He's leaving to take her to a rehabilitation center right now."

"What?!" Dawn exclaimed, her mind racing.

"Apparently, she started experimenting with drugs soon after her mother left."

"At the age of seven?" the teenager skeptically questioned. Her pale eyes suddenly widened. Didn't Karen say she was raped around that same time? Dawn began wondering if the two events were somehow linked together.

"Sweetie, what is it?" her mother asked, concerned.

"Mom, I have to talk to Karen. Something about this just doesn't feel right."

Johanna sighed. "I know this must hard for you to accept, Dawn, but at least Karen will now have the chance to heal. Leaving Haddonfield will be good for her."

Dawn drew out a long breath. "Can you at least tell me where she's going?"

"Glenview," her mother replied. "It's a facility located in Chicago."

The blonde-haired girl silently rose to her feet and walked to the back door.

"Dawn, I don't think you'll make it to the Millers' house before they leave," Johanna said.

"I'm not planning to go to their house, Mom. I'm just going to take a walk to clear my head. I'll be back in a while."

Without a backwards glance, Dawn left the safety of her backyard, determined to find the only person who could help her friend.

* * *

><p>Karen slowly opened her eyes when she heard one of the drawers to her dresser slide open. To her surprise, her father was standing before her vanity, carelessly tossing a handful of clothes into a suitcase that was lying opened on the floor. "Are we going somewhere?" she groggily asked him.<p>

He turned to look at her. "Yes, now get dressed. We will be leaving very shortly."

"Where are we going?"

"To Chicago. It's quite obvious that I can no longer take care of you here. You need professional help."

"Professional help for what?" questioned the teenager.

Her father sighed and said, "You're a drug addict, Karen, so I'm taking you to a rehabilitation center called Glenview. They'll take good care of you there, and by the time you come home, you will be a new person."

"What makes you think I'll come back to you?" Karen asked.

Her father's expression darkened. "Where else will you go? People around here will only see you as a recovering drug addict. I'm the only one you have now, princess."

Karen slid out of bed and painfully walked to his side. He hungrily stared at her half naked form while she snatched a pair of light washed jeans, a simple black t-shirt, and fresh undergarments from her dresser. Then, she turned on her heels and headed straight to the bathroom. She studied her reflection in the mirror, hardly recognizing the person staring back at her. How could she have changed so much in just one day? As much as she would miss Michael Myers and the Johnson family, she had to leave Haddonfield. Her own survival depended on it.

Karen dressed and was in the midst of brushing her hair when her father knocked on the door.

"Come on, Karen. It's time to go."

She grabbed her small bag of toiletries from the linen closet, adding her hairbrush to its contents. She gave her reflection one last glance before turning off the light and opening the bathroom door. "I'm ready," she said.

With her suitcase in hand, Karen's father guided her downstairs and out the front door. She sat down in the car while he locked up the house. After placing her suitcase in the trunk, he joined her. He quickly started the car and backed out of the driveway.

Karen stared out the window, watching the scenery change from quaint neighborhoods to vast green cornfields. She hoped Michael would some day forgive her for leaving him and that he would find another companion more worthy of his affections. She truly believed he deserved better.

"You're thinking about him, aren't you?" voiced her father.

Karen kept her eyes focused on the rolling country side, preventing him from seeing her pain. "It doesn't matter," she dully stated. "I doubt he will still want me after this."

"It's like I said earlier, princess; I'm all you have now."

"I could try to find Mom," Karen retorted, her anger rising. She hated to think that her father was indeed the only person who would ever care for her again.

"Go ahead and try," he jeered. "Even if you do happen to find her, I guarantee it won't do you any good."

The teenager gave her father a sideways glance. "Do you know where she is?"

"Yes," he answered, meeting her gaze, "but her life has decayed so much over the years that she will be of no help to you. Trust me."

Karen returned her eyes to the window. She saw dark storm clouds forming on the horizon. The skyline now looked as bleak as her future. "What's going to happen once I come back home?" she asked.

"We are going to move out of Haddonfield and start afresh, just you and me," he removed a hand from the steering wheel and pressed his palm firmly against her flat abdomen, "and whoever might come along after that."

Karen felt the color drain from her face. "A baby?" she breathed, staring at his hand.

He nodded. "Yes, but before we can think about starting our own family together, you need to get better. I want our children to be healthy."

Karen couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her father truly was a monster—one who she now feared above all else. "Okay, Dad," she said, attempting to regain his trust. "I'll get better for us. I promise."

His hand slid away from her. "I know you will, princess. You have no other choice."

Overwhelmed by the hopelessness of the situation, Karen rested her head against the back of her seat and closed her eyes. One word escaped her conscious thoughts before she slipped into a dreamless sleep.

Michael.

* * *

><p>The Shape stood in the bedroom that had once been his as a child, restlessly staring out the second-story window. He knew his lover was in trouble, yet the bond he had forged with her was not yet strong enough to lead him directly to her. His only choice now was to wait for her to come to him.<p>

All of the sudden, he caught sight of a young woman briskly walking up the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. The girl's hair was much too light to be Karen's. Disappointment turned to rage as the young woman crossed the street, heading straight for his house. The Shape instinctively brandished his kitchen knife. If this female thought she would be welcomed into his home, she was sorely mistaken.

The killer lumbered down the stairway, reaching the bottom step just as the front door creaked open. The young woman's face paled upon seeing him. His fist tightened around his weapon's wooden handle, warning her to leave while she was still able.

"Michael," she said, dismissing the chance he had graciously given her. "I don't mean to intrude on your privacy, but I need to talk to you about Karen."

The Shape's eyes narrowed. Karen mentioned of having to return to a friend's house last night. This female had to be that friend, and since Karen had told her about him, he could only assume they were very close. For his partner's sake, he pocketed his knife. The blond girl took that as an indication to continue speaking.

"I just found out that Karen's father is taking her to Chicago for drug rehab."

The Boogeyman frowned behind his mask.

"I've known Karen a long time," the teenager told him, "and I really don't think she uses drugs. On the other hand, I don't think her father would lie either." The girl sighed, obviously confused. "Her mom left Haddonfield when Karen was seven, and Karen told me she was eight when she was raped. Do you think it's possible that she turned to drugs after going through all of that?"

The Shape firmly shook his head. Although Karen's appearance suggested that she could very well be a drug addict, he, like her friend, didn't believe she was using, at least not on purpose.

He crossed the living room and entered the kitchen. The female was quick to follow. He left the house through the back door, going directly to his car.

"Michael," the girl said, keeping her voice low, "Karen is being taken to a place called Glenview. Do you think you'll be able to find it?"

He nodded.

"If she needs another place to stay, I know my aunt and uncle, who live in Waukegan, will take her. Their address is 1435 Oakwood Drive.

Their estate is located right on Lake Michigan."

The Shape pointed to the passenger door. Instantly, a look of regret crossed the teenager's face.

"I appreciate the offer, Michael, but it will look too suspicious if I go with you. Just let her know that I'm thinking about her, okay?"

The Boogeyman nodded and entered his car. The girl took a step backwards, giving him space to maneuver the Buick down the driveway. As soon as its front tires touched the street, he shifted the car into drive. He then floored the gas pedal. His usual silent exit was marred by the rear tires squealing, yet he paid it little mind. All that mattered to him right now was getting to Karen. She needed him, and there was no way in hell he was going to let her down.

11. August 2, 1997: Part 2

****Chicago, Illinois****

Karen and her father followed Nicole Campbell, an attractive red-headed nurse, down a long hallway until they reached the teenager's new room. Nurse Campbell unlocked the door and urged them to take a look around. The room housed all the necessities one would needâ€"a bed, writing desk, closet, and a private bathroomâ€"however, despite these accommodations, it still felt like a prison cell to Karen.

Her father set her luggage down in front of the closet's wooden doors and said, "Well, I suppose I should leave so you can get settled."

Karen nodded in agreement.

"Don't worry, Mr. Miller," voiced the nurse, "we'll take very good care of her."

"Be sure that you do," her father warned. He gave Karen a tight hug. "I love you," he whispered into her ear. More loudly he said, "I'll call you tomorrow evening." He held her out at arm's length and gave her a long look. Finally, he released her all together. "Good-bye, Karen."

"I'll see you later, Dad."

Nurse Campbell shifted uncomfortably, obviously feeling the tension between the father and daughter. "Come with me, Mr. Miller. I'll show you out."

Once her father and the nurse left her room, Karen sauntered over to the bed and sat down on the firm mattress. Even though she had taken a nap in the car, she still felt exhausted. She leaned back onto the pillow that was propped against the headboard. Her father wanted her to stay here until she got better, but for all she knew, he could return at any time to take her back. She wouldn'tâ€"couldn'tâ€"wait for that to happen. She had to leave and go someplace where she could heal, away from his reach, if that was even possible.

Michael had spoken the truth to her in the barn: he wasn't her Boogeyman; her father was. David Miller had deprived Michael of that particular role in her life the moment he had stolen her innocence. She assumed that was why Fate had led her to the infamous killer that day and why it had seen it fit to unite them once again. Michael Myers was the only one who could truly help her.

A clap of thunder startled the teenager from her thoughts. The light in her room flickered and then went out completely. She blamed the sudden power outage on the storm until she sensed a familiar presence nearby. Michael was somewhere in the building!

Karen instantly leapt out of bed and ran to the door. She was about open it when the doorknob turned under her fingertips. She took a step back. She barely waited for the door to open before dashing into her lover's arms. She tightly hugged him, her body shaking against his. It wasn't until he firmly pushed her from him that she saw he was wearing his white expressionless mask. He didn't say a word to her, just intensely stared at her with his ebony eyes.

At long last, the killer dropped his hands from Karen's shoulders and turned towards her room. With purposeful strides, he entered it. She lost sight of him in the blackness, but a few moments later he reappeared at her side, holding her luggage. Relief flooded into her. He, too, obviously knew that she couldn't stay in this place.

Michael gave Karen her small bag of toiletries to carry. Then, he moved to stand behind her. He wrapped an arm securely around her midsection, pulling her extremely close to him. The darkness suddenly spun around the couple. One minute they were standing in the hallway; the next they were getting pelted by raindrops. The shock of the experience completely overwhelmed the younger's senses. Her body promptly went limp in her lover's embrace as she lost consciousness.

* * *

><p>The Shape's strong grip on Karen kept her from falling onto the wet asphalt. He hoisted her over his shoulder and effortlessly carried her, plus her luggage, to his car. After placing her in the front passenger seat, he shoved her wet belongings onto the floor behind her.<p>

By the time the killer entered the Buick, Karen was shivering. He hastily started the vehicle and turned up the heat. He considered changing her into some dry clothes but then decided he shouldn't take such liberties without her content. If she wanted to make a stop before they reached Waukegan, he would certainly oblige her. In the meantime, he took his mask off and set it between them, giving his own face a chance to dry. Now that he was alone with his lover, there was no need to for him to wear it.

Michael had been driving for about twenty minutes when Karen began to stir. He glanced over at her just in time to see her eyes slowly open. A look of panic crossed her expression, but as soon as her wandering gaze landed on him, the fear dissolved into obvious relief.

"I thought I was dreaming," she said, "but it really is

you."

Michael reluctantly returned his attention to the heavy Chicago traffic. "Who else were you expecting me to be?" he asked. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Karen's head shift in the direction of his mask.

"The Boogeyman," she quietly replied.

When Michael stopped for a red light, he faced his companion and asked, "Karen, what happened to you last night?"

She hesitantly raised her eyes to meet his. "I don't want to talk about it," she said.

The light turned green, and Michael had no choice but to start driving again. His lover's stubborn refusal to answer his inquiry actually came as a surprise. He had expected her to be more forthcoming with him. "Karen, I'm just trying to help you," he gently assured her.

"I know," she retorted. "I'm just not ready to talk about it right now. I promise I'll tell you about it later."

Her response left the killer less than satisfied; however, at the same time, he knew better than to press the issue. "Very well," he conceded, ending the conversation.

Karen kept quiet during the majority of the drive. She seemed content just staring out the window, watching the world go by. It wasn't until they passed a Waukegan road sign that she finally turned her attention back to him.

"Dawn paid you a visit, didn't she? That's how you knew where to find me."

Michael gave the teenager a sideways glance. "She never formally introduced herself," he stated, "though, I admit, the name does fit."

"Yeah, it does," Karen agreed. "She's a good friend of mine."

"Yes, I figured that, which is why I refrained from killing her."

Michael could feel his partner's dark eyes boring into him as she said, "I thought you only killed on Halloween."

"When a person comes into my house looking for me, the rules change, Karen. I am not going to be held accountable for one's stupidity." The killer momentarily paused and then continued to say, "Nevertheless, Dawn does seem to have a pretty sound head on her shoulders. I can see why you chose her as a friend."

"I didn't exactly choose her," the teenager informed him, "but it did end up working out well." She inhaled a deep breath and slowly let it out. "I just wish I hadn't involved her in this," she finished softly.

"Karen, you can't blame yourself for the decisions others ultimately

make."

"No, I suppose not."

Silence, once again, fell over the couple. This time Michael was the one who eventually broke it. "We're here," he announced.

Karen squinted out the windshield. "I don't see anything," she argued.

"Dawn's aunt and uncle's house lies just beyond those trees," he said. "You shouldn't have any trouble finding it."

The teenager's face instantly paled. "Wait," she gasped, "you're not coming with me?"

Michael slowly shook his head. "Believe me, Karen, it's for the best."

His soulmate looked absolutely grief-stricken, yet she still stepped out of the Buick. Without leaving his vehicle, the killer passed her luggage to her. He instantly noticed her brown eyes were bright with unshed tears. "Karen," he groaned, wishing he didn't have to leave her in such a desolate state, "I will return to you. I promise." She offered him a sad smile and then pushed the door closed. He waited until she disappeared into the trees before spinning his car around. His next stop: Haddonfield.

12. August 2, 1997: Part 3

Karen walked out of the small patch of woods only to come across a high wrought-iron gate. Her eyes instantly widened. A fair distance beyond the fence sat the grandest mansion she had ever seen. It sat perfectly situated on top of a small hill, overlooking Lake Michigan. She could hear the lake's powerful waves crashing onto the shore even above the noise of another brewing storm.

"Pretty, isn't it?" asked a soft voice.

Karen nearly jumped out of her skin. She had somehow missed seeing the elderly woman standing just to her left.

A large black umbrella hovered ominously over the woman's silver hair, casting a dark shadow over her face. She extended a pale bony finger out from underneath her burgundy cape and pushed a button on her side of the fence. The heavy gate creaked open on its rusted hinges.

The teenager hesitantly entered the vast front yard.

"Don't be scared, dear," the woman said. "We've been expecting you. Dawn phoned this afternoon, preparing us for yours and Michael's arrival."

Under the circumstances, Karen could not fault her best friend for betraying her secret about Michael. Dawn had every right to warn her relatives of the killer's involvement. Just because he had chosen to spare Dawn's life didn't mean he would extend that same grace to Dawn's family members.

The woman's alert gray eyes searched the area behind Karen. "Speaking of which, where is your companion?" she asked, frowning.

"He's gone," the brunette dismally answered.

"Don't fret, dear. He'll come backâ€”in his own time." The woman directed the teenager towards the mansion. "Come; let's get you inside before it starts raining again."

"Who are you?" Karen suddenly asked. She sensed this woman was much more than she appeared.

The corners of the woman's mouth twitched as though she was fighting a smile. "Do I frighten you?"

"Yes and no," the teenager truthfully responded.

"Fair enough," the woman stated. "My name is Eleanor Helms. My son and his wife own this house. I've been living with them for a few years now. They're good people, Karen. They will keep you safe."

The brunette sighed. "I'm actually more concerned about Dawn. I hope she'll be all right."

"I'm sure she'll be fine, dear."

Despite the older woman's reassurance, the younger remained unconvinced. Once her father learned of her disappearance, Karen knew he would seek retributionâ€”and the Johnson family would be the first to pay. Fear crept up her spine. Maybe leaving Glenview hadn't been such a wise decision after all.

"So much worry for someone so young," Eleanor quietly mused. She continued by saying, "No matter what happens, Karen, Michael was right to bring you here."

"I know," the teenager said as they climbed the front steps. "It's just that everything has suddenly gotten so complicated."

"Which is why it's good that you came to us." Eleanor opened the door and said, "Just leave your belongings here, dear. Our butler will take them up to your bedroom. In the meantime, I will give you the grand tour of the house."

Karen followed the older woman from room to room in silent awe. After Eleanor had shown her the kitchen; the study; the sunroom; the sitting room; the music room; and the ball room, they stepped into an elevator and traveled to the second floor.

Ten bedrooms later they finally reached the room that had been designated to Karen. Like all the others, it was equipped with a King-sized bed; an ornate vanity; a walk-in closet; a large desk; a luxurious private bathroom; and a set of French doors, which opened to a balcony.

"So, what do you think?" Eleanor asked.

"It's magnificent," Karen breathed. "The entire house is. I've never seen anything like it before."

The older woman grinned. "I'm glad it pleases you, dear."

"There you are, Mother," said a man upon entering the bedroom. "Rebekah and I thought you were still outside."

"Even I have enough sense to come out of the rain," Eleanor stated, sounding a little disgruntled. "Nathaniel, may I introduce to you Karen Miller. Karen, this is my son Nathaniel Helms."

The handsome auburn-haired man cordially nodded and extended his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Karen. I just wish we were meeting under better circumstances. Dawn informed us about your unfortunate situation."

"Oh?" the teenager asked. "And what exactly did she tell you?"

"To be blunt, Karen, she thinks your father is an evil man and that you should never go back to him."

"Well, she is right about my father," Karen reluctantly admitted, "but she doesn't know the half of it. No one does."

Nathaniel raised an eyebrow at her. "Not even Michael?"

The brunette wordlessly shook her head.

"Is he here?"

"No, he couldn't stay."

Karen did not miss the brief look of relief that passed through Nathaniel's hazel eyes. She supposed anyone would be happy not to have the serial killer lurking aboutâ€"anyone but her.

"You should really change out of your damp clothes, dear," Eleanor said. She glanced at her son. "I've made her stay in them far too long."

"Yes, of course," Nathaniel agreed, keeping his gaze on Karen. "Just to let you know, we traditionally eat dinner at six. That gives you about an hour to get ready. Please, don't be late."

Eleanor and Nathaniel left the room, giving the teenager some much needed privacy. She unzipped her suitcase, which was sitting next to the vanity. Her father hadn't packed any formal clothes for her to wear, so she had to settle on a pair of khakis and a forest green knit top. Then, she grabbed her overnight bag and went onto the bathroom to take a hot shower.

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

By the time Michael reached Haddonfield, the needle on his Buick's gas gage had dropped down to "E". He cursed under his breath. If Karen hadn't shown so much concern over her friend's well-being, he would still be in Waukegan with her.

The worst part wasn't leaving his companion behind. No, it was the fact that she didn't believe he would return to her. Whatever had happened to her the night before had shaken her to the core. Seeing

as though she wouldn't speak to him about it, he decided to seek out Dawn.

Her friendship with Karen placed Dawn in a unique position. As long as the two girls remained friends, Michael would never be able to kill the blonde girl. However, he was certain Karen's assaulter would have no qualms about doing away with Dawn, especially since she and Karen were so close. Michael knew Karen wouldn't be able to handle losing her best friend on top of everything else she had suffered; therefore, he had no choice but to play the role of protector to Dawn as well. But this rare act of mercy ended with her. All other individuals associated with the two girls remained threatened by his rage, just like everyone else.

Michael parked his car near Haddonfield Park. His keen intuition told him Dawn was somewhere close by. He concealed his face behind his mask and then left the vehicle. He followed the main path into the park.

The Shape was just rounding a bend in the trail when his ears picked up the sound of female sobs. He instinctively knew they belonged to Dawn. His eyes darted about until he finally saw her sitting within the deep shadows of the trees. He silently walked to her trembling form and dropped down beside her. It took her a full minute to realize she was no longer alone, unlike Karen who could always detect his presence quite easily. That gift is what set his lover apart from all the others, including Dawn.

"Michael!" the blonde teenager gasped as she wiped her tears away with the back of her hand. "I wasn't expecting to see you again so soon. Is Karen okay?"

The killer shrugged, which caused a look of concern to cross Dawn's pale face.

"Is she at least safe?"

He nodded.

"Did you take her to my aunt's house?"

He repeated the affirmative head gesture.

Dawn paused a long moment before saying, "As soon as Karen's father found out she went missing, he came over to my house to speak to my parents and me. One thing led to another, and I ended up asking him if Karen had, in fact, been sexually assaulted as a kid. You know what he said?"

The Shape could almost guess, yet he shook his head, allowing the teenager to tell him.

"He said there wasn't any evidence to support her claim, so a report about the alleged assault was never filed." Another tear formed at the corner of Dawn's eye and slowly slid down her cheek. "He also said that around that same time, Karen started blaming him for her mother leaving them and that she had just made up the story to get back at him for causing her so much pain." The platinum-haired girl shifted closer to the Shape and said, "Michael, Karen's father has always controlled her life, and she told me it's because of what

happened to her in the past. What I don't understand is if he didn't believe her, then why does he continue to be so protective of her? It just doesn't make sense."

The Shape leaned back on his heels as he contemplated the situation at hand. It seemed as though Karen's father was trying to protect her assaulter rather than his daughter. If that was the case, then who was he protecting—a friend; another family member; or, heaven forbid, he himself?

"Michael, are you absolutely certain that Karen was assaulted?" Dawn asked, interrupting his train of thought.

He soundly nodded. No one who had seen Karen that fateful afternoon would have been able to believe otherwise.

"Do you know who attacked her?"

The Shape audibly sighed and gave his head a negative shake.

"Do you think anyone does?"

The killer suddenly rose to his feet, startling the teenager. He beckoned her to follow him and began walking the identical route Karen had taken after her assault. Dawn fell into step beside him. She kept throwing him curious glances but remained quiet during their journey. Upon reaching their destination, he firmly pushed her towards the house Karen had visited almost a decade before.

Without hesitation, Dawn climbed the front steps. The Shape slipped into darker shadow while she rang the door bell. The same woman who had spoken to Karen all those years ago greeted Dawn now.

"Mrs. Hekman!" the teenager gasped.

The woman's blue eyes narrowed. "Were you looking for someone else?"

"No," the girl promptly answered. "You're the one I came to see. I need to speak to you about Karen Miller."

The woman's folded her arms across her chest and gave Dawn a hard look. "What of her?"

Undaunted by the woman's abrasiveness, the teenager said, "I have just learned that she was sexually assaulted as a child, and I am under the impression that you may know something about it."

The woman instantly shook her head. "I'm sorry, Dawn, but no one ever informed me of such an event taking place."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Liar," the Shape hissed through his mask's unmoving lips.

Dawn's expression darkened. "I don't believe you," she stated in a low voice, echoing his sentiments.

The woman sighed. "Dawn, if something like that had actually happened to Karen, don't you think her father would have notified the school about it?"

The girl remained quiet, but the Boogeyman could almost taste her anger.

"That's what I thought," the woman concluded. "Now, if you excuse me, it's getting late." She didn't wait for reply before closing the door in Dawn's face.

Disgruntled, the teenager turned and began walking towards the Shape. Once he knew she was no longer being watched, he joined her on the sidewalk. "She's lying," the blonde girl sourly accused.

He nodded in agreement.

"So now what?"

The killer's shoulders raised and then fell. His lover held all the answers, but until she was ready to talk, there wasn't much more anyone could do to help her.

"Do you think Karen will be okay?" Dawn asked. "Honestly?"

He nodded, though he knew the road ahead would be a rocky one for everyone involved.

"No offense, Michael, but I still think you should have stayed with her."

He gave his head a light shake and pointed to the girl.

"I don't understand," she admitted. "You came back for me?"

Yes.

She playfully batted her eyes at him, clearly attempting to lighten the mood. "Aww, Michael, that's so sweet. My knight in shining armor."

In return, he rolled his eyes and began walking down the sidewalk.

"Hey!" Dawn exclaimed. "Wait for me!"

He continued moving, making her jog up to him.

"Ass," she mumbled under her breath.

He simply shrugged.

"Aren't you afraid someone will see you?"

No.

"Darn it, Michael, don't you ever talk?"

He stared at the blonde girl but did not respond in any other

way.

She sighed and said, "Karen's not much of a talker either. We've been friends for almost nine years, and I still don't know a lot about her. She keeps a lot to herself, obviously more than she should."

The Shape nodded. In the short amount of time he had spent with Karen, he had learned just how tight-lipped she could be. He felt Dawn's frustration, especially now.

The teenager didn't speak to him again until they reached her house. "I can't believe I'm asking you this," she said, "but did you want to come inside?"

Although he really hadn't planned on lingering, the killer accepted her offer with a short nod.

Dawn wordlessly led him into her home. At once, he smelled Karen's scent in air, and it had a startling effect on his anatomy. Thankfully, Dawn was too distracted to take notice of the change. He took a few deep breaths as he followed her up a stairway. By the time they reached the landing, his body had returned to its normal state—much to his relief.

The teenager showed him directly to her bedroom. His eyes immediately landed on a picture frame sitting on her desk.

"That was taken on Karen's sixteenth birthday," she told him after shutting the door. "It's the only one I have of us together. Karen's a bit camera shy."

The Shape moved to the desk and intensely studied the photograph of the younger version of his lover. She may have been smiling in the picture, but a shadow of fear shone within the depths of her dark brown eyes. _Who's your boogeyman, Karen?_ he silently asked. _Who is it that you fear most?_

"Karen and I became friends a year after she met you," Dawn said, drawing his attention away from the photograph. "That's when my family moved here from Roselawn, Indiana."

She sat down on her bed. The killer didn't think it would be prudent to join her on the mattress, so he remained standing.

"My mom started watching Karen after school as a favor to her father," the teenager continued. She paused a long moment and then added, "He and my dad work together. They're both cops."

The Shape's eyes widened. No wonder Dawn had been shocked that Karen's father never reported the assault. As a man of the law he should have, so, again, why hadn't he?

"Michael, my parents don't know who to believe at this point. They want to think that Karen is innocent, but the evidence against her is damning. And let's face it, anyone who has seen her within the last few years will assume that she is the drug addict her father says she is."

The killer reluctantly nodded. No matter how much he wished

otherwise, Dawn spoke the truth.

"Karen doesn't talk about her family very much," the blond girl said, "but I do know that she and her father have a strained relationship, and according to her, it started going downhill soon after her mother left." Dawn sighed. "I don't want to jump to any conclusions, but do you think it's possible that he's the one who attacked her?"

The words Karen had spoken the night before clearly resounded in the Shape's head: _I know they are nothing more than dreams, but they always feel so real. In fact, at times, I could have sworn you were actually in my bed with me._ His blood ran cold. What if she hadn't been dreaming? What if someone really had been sneaking into her bed at night? What if her father truly was her boogeyman? The hatred the masked killer felt in that instant was stronger than any he had ever experienced before. All he knew for certain was that he wanted Karen's attacker dead.

"MICHAEL!"

The sheer terror in Dawn's voice snapped him back to his senses. To his utter surprise, she was lying beneath him with a horrified expression on her face. The fingers of his right hand were clenched around his knife's smooth handle while its sharp blade was pressed against her throat. Blood trickled down from a small wound where the weapon had pierced her skin.

The Shape hastily moved away from the blond girl and sheathed his knife. She shakily sat up and touched her neck. As his rage receded, it was replaced by an unfamiliar emotion—one he couldn't recall ever feeling in his entire existence—and that was remorse. He took an unsteady step backwards. He truly hadn't met to hurt the teenager.

"Michael, it's okay; I understand," she gently assured him. "I'm angry, too."

He nodded, grateful that she at least understood the reason behind his unintentional attack.

"How bad is it?" she asked. "Will it need stitches?"

The killer shook his head. Fortunately, he hadn't given her much more than a scratch.

Dawn slightly smiled and said, "I didn't think so." She reached over and grabbed a few tissues from her bed stand. After applying pressure on the cut for a few minutes, it stopped bleeding. "There," she said, throwing the wad of tissues away. "All better. Now, about my parents—"

The Shape tilted his head at her.

"I think they deserve to know what's going on with Karen."

He gave an immediate nod of approval. Karen needed all the support she could get at this point, and he was certain that once Dawn's parents learned the truth, they would side with his lover.

"I was also thinking about visiting her before school starts. Would

that be okay with you?"

He saw no reason to keep the two friends apart, so he shook his head yes.

"I know she'll want to see you again, too," Dawn timidly added.

This time he didn't respond, for that remained debatable. Karen's refusal to tell him anything suggested the presence of both shame and fear—two emotions that could easily turn her away from him when given time to fester. His departure may have upset her, but that didn't mean she would be happy to see him upon his return.

After her last statement, Dawn turned quiet, and the Shape quickly decided it was time to leave. She moved to stand, but he waved her to remain seated. He was more than capable of seeing himself out.

Within seconds of closing the bedroom door, he was striding back towards his car. He craved more answers about his lover's past, yet he had no idea where else to look for them. Admitting defeat, he entered his car and turned the key.

He began driving up the road, planning to go home when a doe dashed out into his lane. In an attempt to save his vehicle, he instinctively turned onto a deserted gravel road, narrowly missing the large animal. Enraged, he glared at the deer through the rear-view mirror. Its black eyes calmly met his. They stared at each other for a few seconds. Then, the creature bounded to the opposite side of the road and vanished into the thick shrubbery.

The Shape shook his head, ready to put the whole incident behind him. It wasn't until he reached for the gear shift that his intuition told him to continue down the dirt road. He placed his hand back on the steering wheel and kept driving. A few miles later the road dead-ended. He exited the car, relying on pure instinct to guide his footsteps.

After trekking through a patch of dense woods, he came to the same pond where he and Karen had met for the first time. He now knew she had been molested close to where he had parked his car. Although that was definitely a secluded area, why take her there? The place had to have held some significance for her assaulter.

The Shape turned and started backtracking to his vehicle. He scanned the ground as he walked, determined not to miss any clues that might explain Karen's attacker's motives for bringing her to this particular location. Nothing looked out of place, but something told him to keep searching.

As he was passing a fallen tree limb, his right shirt sleeve caught on one of its branches. He glanced down to assess the damage, and that's when he saw it. Entangled amongst the limb's dead twigs hung a tarnished silver necklace. A small cross pendant dangled from the chain. It was an exact replica of Karen's, except for both the color of metal and the birthstone that was imbedded in its center.

The killer didn't need to look twice to know that he had just found his lover's mother's necklace. He quickly noticed the chain was still intact, which meant it had been purposely placed on the limb. _A

grave marker_, he grimly thought. Karen's mother was dead.

A single tear unexpectedly rolled down the Shape's face underneath his mask. It was then he truly understood just how much Karen meant to him. He hadn't shed the tear on her mother's behalf but because of the profound impact her death had on Karen's life. _And still is_, he thought ruefully.

He raised his head and engrained every detail of this section of woods into his memory. One day, he would have to bring his lover here in order to give her closure. In the meantime, he wouldn't say a word about this to her until she proved ready to confront her pastâ€”however long that took.

The killer walked away from the make-shift grave and swiftly returned to his Buick. He now knew without a doubt that Karen's father was the perpetrator of these heinous crimes. Even though the Shape wanted nothing more than to find and kill the cop, Karen deserved the chance to face her father first, especially after the hell he put her through.

The Shape started his car. The lack of gas in its tank prevented him from going anywhere other than his house. Perhaps under the circumstances that wasn't such a bad thing. His intuition would tell him when it was the right time to return to his lover. Until then, he would simply wait.

13. August 2, 1997: Part 4

****Waukegan, Illinois****

After dinner, the Helms invited Karen to sit with them in the parlor. She sat down on a chair in front of a large bay window. As the adults poured themselves some drinks, her eyes strayed to Rebekah Helms. The silver blonde-haired woman reminded Karen a lot of Dawn. Not only did they resemble each other in looks, but they both possessed the gracefulness and elegance that Karen lacked. Dawn could easily fit into this grand lifestyle whereas the brunette felt slightly out of place.

Once everyone sat down, all eyes turned to her. Very little conversation had been attempted at dinner, but she got the feeling all of that was about to change.

"So, Karen, tell us a little about yourself," Rebekah encouraged.

The teenager nervously cleared her throat. "What exactly do you want to know?"

Rebekah took a sip of wine and then said, "I admit I am curious to learn how someone like you ended up becoming friends with a known serial killer."

Karen raised an eyebrow at her. "Someone like me?" she questioned.

"Forgive us, Karen," Nathaniel interjected, "but you don't seem like the type of person who would associate herself with such an evil

being."

"True," the brunette admitted, "but what if I told you there is someone in my life more threatening to me than Michael Myers and that Michael is the only one who can truly protect me from this person?"

"You're speaking of your father."

Karen gave her head sharp nod. "Yes."

"Can you tell us what he has done to you?" Rebekah asked.

The teenager decided the Helms deserved know the truth. She took a deep breath and said, "He raped me when I was eight, and last night I discovered that he has slept with me countless of times since then."

Dead silence followed the brunette's shocking statement.

"He took me to Glenview Rehabilitation Center this morning," Karen continued, "but Michael Myers rescued me and brought me here."

"I don't understand," Rebekah voiced, "why would your father take you to Glenview?"

"Because he has been drugging me for years, and I think he finally realized the negative effects it was having on me."

"In short, he was slowly killing you," Nathaniel said.

"Yes," Karen answered. Eleanor's gray eyes pierced hers, yet the older woman remained quiet. The brunette finally looked away, unnerved by Eleanor's steady gaze.

"Going through detox won't be easy, Karen," warned Nathaniel, "but we'll help you through it the best we can."

Surprised, the teenager asked, "So you're still going to let me stay with you?"

"Yes, of course."

"But what if my father comes here looking for me?"

"Michael will return before that happens," Eleanor sternly voiced.

"In the meantime, this will be your new home," Nathaniel told Karen.

She offered him a small smile. "Well, thank you. I really do appreciate it."

"We know you do," Rebekah said, rising to her feet. "Now, if you excuse me, I'm going to retire for the evening." She turned to her husband. "Nathaniel?"

He also stood up. "Yes, darling, I'm coming. Pleasant dreams, Karen." He gave Eleanor a knowingly look. "Good night, Mother."

"Good night, Son." As soon as the couple left the room, Eleanor addressed the teenager. "There is a reason why you were chosen to be Michael's companion, Karen," she said. "You are specialâ€”very special. The strength you have shown throughout the years proves it."

Karen shook her head. "You're wrong, Ms. Helms. I'm definitely not as strong as you think I am."

"Oh? And what makes you say that?"

Tears stung the brunette's eyes as she thought back to the previous night. "Because I'm not, alright?" she angrily retorted. "Michael Myers may have helped me this far, but I'm not expecting him to still want me once he learns the truth about my father."

Eleanor deeply sighed. "Karen, dear, that's absurd. If Michael thought for one second you were unworthy to be his soulmate, he never would have left Haddonfield to bring you here. Telling him about your father isn't going to change his feelings towards you. If anything, it will bring you two closer together. You must understand that." When the teenager remained silent, Eleanor said, "Go and get some sleep, Karen. One of these days Michael will prove to you that I am right."

Karen did not hesitate to leave the room. Even though Eleanor Helms had given her a lot to ponder, her brain was just too tired to think any more tonight. She entered her bedroom, changed into her night clothes, and sank into bed. She closed her eyes, finally allowing her body the sleep it so desperately craved.

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

As nighttime settled over Haddonfield, David Miller arrived home. He slammed the front door closed and then stormed upstairs to his bedroom. He reached into his closet, grabbing a shoebox from the top shelf. He sat down on the edge of his bed while he shifted through the snapshots he had secretly taken of his precious girl. His gaze lingered on his favorite photograph. In it, Karen was sleeping peacefully on the family room sofa after succumbing to the effects of the drug he had given her the evening following their very first tryst.

The only reason he had drugged her that night was to ease her nerves. However, it later became apparent that drugging her was the only way he could be with her. He never intended their love-making to turn into an every night occurrence, but he had quickly become addicted to it. He couldn't imagine losing her to someone else. She was his and his alone. No one would ever know herâ€”love herâ€”like he did.

He set the box of pictures on his nightstand. He was certain Karen's new lover was responsible for Karen's escape from Glenview. The ease in which he had found her suggested that someone had tipped him off. "Dawn," he snarled under his breath. He berated himself for allowing Karen and Dawn to become so close, but he also knew Karen wouldn't have survived this long if it hadn't been for her friendship with the blonde girl.

Unfortunately, Dawn's usefulness had just run out. Both she and

Karen's boyfriend would pay for their interference. It was just a matter of time. As for his daughter, he would make sure she remained hisâ€”forever.

14. August 20, 1997: Part 1

****TWO WEEKS LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****August 20, 1997****

Eleanor Helms sat in a chair next to Karen's sleeping form, her thin lips pursed with concern. Two weeks had passed since the teenager had come to live with them, and instead of showing signs of improvement like they had hoped, her health had taken a frightening turn for the worse. A few days ago her body had started rejecting food, and today not even liquids stayed long in her stomach. Eleanor knew at this rate the brunette's chances of survival were very slim.

"She needs to go to the hospital, Mother," Nathaniel stated upon entering the bedroom.

The woman quickly shook her head. "No, Son, she needs more than that. I have already called Dawn and asked her to come here."

"Along with the orders to bring Michael, I presume?" Nathaniel inquired.

"Yes," Eleanor bluntly answered.

His hazel eyes narrowed. "Mother, do you really think it's wise inviting Michael Myers here? Maybe for Karen's sake it would be better to send her to a medical facility. Surely doctors and medicines will be able to help her more than a dangerous serial killer. It seems delusional for you to believe that he is the only person who can save her."

Eleanor raised an eyebrow at her son. "Does it?" she questioned. "Then let me ask you this: is there anyone else out there who can promise her the same protection Michael has graciously offered her?"

Nathaniel remained silent.

"He cares for Karen," the woman continued.

"And what about us?" Nathaniel haughtily asked. "He could easily kill us all."

"True," Eleanor agreed, "but his agenda is to keep Karen safe. As long as we comply with his wishes, then he will allow us to live."

"You seem very certain of this."

"I am."

"So be it, Mother," conceded Nathaniel. "I just hope you are

right."

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

The Shape lay in a Queen-sized bed, staring up at the cracked plaster ceiling above his head. Conveniently, during his institutionalization at Smith's Grove, his house had been furnished by a local realtor in order to entice potential buyers to purchase it. However, not even giving the house a spark of life had saved it from sitting vacant those fifteen years. Nearly two decades later the furniture still remained in the house, for no one had ever bothered to reclaim it. The Shape could have easily disposed of the foreign fixtures, but a few of them proved to be useful, like the bed. The others he just let sit in the house, collecting dust, maintaining the illusion that no one inhabited the house.

Not that it really mattered. Because nearly nineteen years had passed since his last killing spree, most people assumed he was dead—disintegrated in the explosion that Samuel Loomis had purposely caused within the confines of Haddonfield Memorial Hospital. Setting the fire had been the doctor's final attempt on that Halloween night to stop the Boogeyman from murdering Laurie Strode, who, at the time, was the last surviving member of the Myers' family, besides Michael.

The Shape had managed to escape the inferno with only minor burns. Loomis, however, had not been so fortunate. Still, the doctor's injuries had not hindered him from helping Laurie feign her death in what the local newspaper had called "a tragic car accident". Tragic indeed, the killer bitterly thought. The only thing tragic about the incident was his sister's obvious cowardice. Her ploy had not deceived him by any means. He knew full well that his blood relative was still alive and awaiting his inevitable return, for she would be a damn fool not to be.

The Shape sat up and flung his legs over the edge of the bed. Not only was Laurie still alive but years ago she had added another branch to the Myers family tree. He assumed she had left Haddonfield to protect her child from him. What she failed to realize was that the rage he felt towards his family members could not be stopped. One way or another he would locate their whereabouts and then kill them. If the Myers' bloodline was to continue, it would be through him and him alone.

The thought of conceiving offspring never appealed to him until after being intimate with Karen. The excitement he had felt while giving her pleasure was incomparable to anything he had ever experienced before. She was definitely a unique individual, and it had nothing to do with what had happened to her as a child. It had been instilled in her since birth. Anyone close to her would be able to sense it as well, which would explain why her father had developed feelings for her.

Although the Shape could sympathize with Karen's father on some level, he would never condone the cop's actions. Raping and committing incest on a child was an inexcusable crime. The masked killer should have been Karen's first and only lover. He regretted that she had lost her innocence at such an early age, particularly to someone who had no right taking it.

The killer's feelings for Karen increased with each passing day. He was reluctant to call it love; however, it was definitely more than simple lust. He cared about her a lot and missed her just as much. She constantly occupied his thoughts, which is why he was still awake. His body didn't require much sleep in order to function, but it did desire more than what he was currently giving it.

He could think of only one cure for this bout of insomnia and that was to visit his soulmate. There was only one problem—his car still needed gas. The best solution would be persuading Dawn to go with him. That way he could maintain a low profile while protecting the blond teenager at the same time.

The Shape purposefully stood up and exited the master bedroom. He doubted Dawn would be very happy to see him at such a late hour, but now that he planned to take her with him, it was imperative that they leave Haddonfield before sunrise.

The killer quickly journeyed downstairs. He had barely crossed the threshold into the kitchen when the back door suddenly flung open. He stopped midstep, knowing the intruder's identity even before her pale form entered his house. Dawn took one look at him and said, "We have to go to Waukegan."

He nodded in concurrence, though the panic in her expression told him her reason for needing to leave Haddonfield was much different than his own.

"Karen's sick—dying even," she hastily informed him. "We need to go to her. Now."

The Shape grabbed the girl's hand and led her outside to his car. He opened the door and pointed to the gas gauge.

"I got it covered," she said, pulling out a twenty dollar bill from her jeans' pocket, "as long as it has enough gas to reach a gas station. Otherwise we'll have to take Karen's car."

The masked killer sat down in the driver's seat, wordlessly telling Dawn that his car did indeed have enough gas to get them to a station. This time she didn't hesitate to join him inside the Buick. She kept quiet as he pulled out of the driveway, but the worried look in her pale blue eyes spoke volumes.

After a few minutes, she turned her steady gaze onto him. "Michael, you don't think she'll really die, do you?" she asked.

The Shape remained motionless, not taking his eyes off the dark road. He had seen death many times, but the idea of his lover succumbing to that fate seemed unfathomable. However, she was mortal just like all the others; therefore, not immune to death. The possibility of her dying suddenly became a harsh reality, one of which he could not accept. He refused to lose the only person he truly cared for. Somehow—some way—he would prevent her from leaving him.

"Michael—?"

He slowly shook his head, finally answering Dawn's inquiry. No, Karen would not die. He would make sure of it.

The blonde teenager shifted in her seat, briefly drawing his attention away from the road. When their eyes met she said, "I'm very grateful she has you, Michael."

The killer knew Dawn spoke the truth and appreciated her kind sentiment. Karen was very fortunate to have such a loyal friend.

A few minutes later, he turned into the drive of the only all-night gas station in Haddonfield and parked at the farthest pump. He waited in the car while Dawn went into the station to pay for the gas. When she came back out, she looked somewhat perturbed. He watched her as she filled up the gas tank. Her eyes periodically drifted from the pump to the small building. Once she finished, she disappeared back into the station, presumably to collect her change. She was gone longer this time, and there was definitely a haste in her step upon her return. As soon as he entered the car, he sped away from the building.

Eventually, Dawn relaxed in her seat. The Shape stole a glance in her direction. She met his eyes and said, "I'm fine. The cashier just made me uncomfortable, that's all."

He nodded, directing his attention back to the road.

"Michael, when you and Karen first met, did you know right away that she was destined to be your soulmate?" she asked.

He offered the teenager another nod.

"Were you ever tempted to act on those feelings before you two met the second time?"

The killer shook his head. Although his desire for Karen had increased during the years, it hadn't reached its peak until the day of their second meeting. That's how he had known to wait for her in the barn that particular afternoon.

"Considering what she went through, do you regret waiting?"

He gave his head a stern shake. If he would have taken Karen as his lover before she was truly ready, the result would have been disastrous for them both. Like always, timing had been everything.

"Do you love her?"

The Shape's head snapped around, and he shot Dawn a deadly glare. Up until now he hadn't minded her questions, but this time she had gone too far—"too personal."

"Sorry," she timidly apologized. "I shouldn't have asked."

The teenager stopped speaking after that giving the killer time to contemplate his next course of action. At this point, he predicted that Karen would not be happy to see him. He also doubted she would want to tell him anything about her father. Most likely he would have to break her—"something he definitely did not wish to do, yet it would be imperative for her survival."

Time escaped the Shape as his thoughts remained focused on his lover. Before he realized it, he was driving down the lane that led to Dawn's aunt's house. He parked his car alongside the tall wrought-iron fence that surrounded the property line, not even bothering to conceal his and Dawn's arrival.

An elderly woman quickly appeared at the front gate, allowing them immediate entry into the courtyard. Dawn exited the Buick and approached her. The Shape deliberately followed suit. The woman's gray eyes followed him as he passed through the gate; however, they did not hold the look of fear, just resolve.

"Michael," said Dawn, "this is my great-aunt Eleanor Helms. She's the one who called me about Karen."

"Well someone had to," the woman retorted, directly addressing the serial killer. "She's not doing well, and you had every right to know. She's losing strength both mentally and physically. She hasn't spoken or eaten in days. My son believes she is merely suffering from withdrawal and that doctors and medicines will cure her. I know better. She needs you, Michael."

The Shape stiffened upon hearing this news while Dawn's expression turned to one of pure confusion. "Wait," she quickly interjected. "Did you say withdrawal?"

Eleanor Helms slowly nodded.

"I don't understand," the teenager said. "Withdrawal from what? Drugs?"

The woman's eyes looked passed her, once again landing on the masked killer. "Michael, go to her. Make her talk. I will keep Dawn with me."

He gave a sharp nod and disappeared into shadow. A few moments later, he entered the large house, his long strides filled with purpose. His presence went unnoticed as he walked up the grand staircase leading to the second floor. He followed a long corridor down to the last bedroom. He slowly opened the door. Karen's sleeping form lay in the bed, her face highlighted by a sliver of moonlight that was entering the room through a small gap in the window curtains. The soft glow made her face appear as white as his mask, which he was now holding in his hand. He set the mask on her nightstand and knelt down next to her. He gently touched her temple and whispered her name into her ear.

Tears formed under his lover's eyelashes and proceeded to slide down her cheeks. "You shouldn't have come back," she said.

"You can't fight this alone, Karen," Michael firmly replied. "Whether you want to admit it or not, you need me here."

Her dark eyes fluttered open. It took them a moment to focus on him, but once they did, he saw that they were filled with deep anguish. "I want you to leave," she demanded, her tone harsh.

Michael suddenly leaned over her, his black eyes boring into hers. "You know damn well that isn't going to happen," he hissed. She tried pushing him away, but he remained steadfast, keeping her trapped

between his body and the mattress. "Now," he continued, "I want you to tell me who attacked you that day near the pond and what he has done to you since."

Fear suddenly replaced the pain in Karen's expression. He bent his head close to hers and asked, "Why are you so afraid to talk to me?"

"Because I don't want you to hate me," she softly answered, averting her gaze to his chest.

Michael gently cupped her chin in his hand and tilted her head up. He didn't intend to kiss her, but his mouth instinctively found hers. He was quickly reminded of how much he desired her—"perhaps even loved her. "I could never hate you, Karen," he murmured against her lips. "Never."

She studied him for a long moment and then said, "It was my father."

Those were the words Michael had been waiting to hear. His lover's expression remained passive as he moved away from her, allowing her room to sit up. He wanted to say something to comfort her; however, now was not the time for such sentiments. "Karen, I need to know what he has done to you," he urged.

Her gaze turned to his mask.

"Karen," he firmly stated, "you have to trust me."

She deliberately nodded and returned her eyes back to him. In the hours that followed, she relived the events which had occurred before, during, and after her rape. When she finished her horrific tale, she was once again in tears.

"I'm so sorry, Michael," she mournfully apologized. "I never should have believed he would keep his promise to me. I was so naïve."

Michael pulled his partner into his arms and held her tightly on his lap. Despite the anger brewing within him, he calmly said, "You were not naïve, Karen. You were a child, who had no other choice but to believe him. You cannot blame yourself for that." He paused for a short moment and then added, "I certainly don't."

Her eyes instantly met his, and he could see her reservations about him starting to fade. "I should have told you about my father sooner," she said.

"Yes," he bluntly replied, "but I also understand why you didn't."

Karen leaned into him, resting her head against his chest. "Thank you for coming back to me, Michael."

He firmly pressed a kiss to her crown. "You're welcome."

As she continued to sit on his lap, the sexual tension within Michael's body rose, momentarily subsiding his rage. Karen must have noticed the change because she instantly turned her face upwards. He

couldn't fight his desire any longer. He captured her lips in a passionate kiss. The fervor in which she returned his kiss told him she wanted this as much as he did.

He impatiently slid a hand up her simple cotton nightshirt while keeping the other on the small of her back. He couldn't stop himself from touching the most intimate part of her. She writhed in his embrace while he intensely pleased her. It wasn't long before she tore her mouth away from his and gasped, "Michael, stop! Please stop! I can't take anymore!"

He knew she hadn't reached her peak; however, he complied with her wishes, not wanting to wear her out just yet. He moved his hand farther up her body, stopping at her breasts. He fondled each one, enjoying the way they felt in his palm. As he tweaked one of her taunt nipples, her fingers began toying with the zipper pull of his coveralls. "Don't be shy, Karen," he gently commanded.

She nodded and slowly pulled the zipper down. She raised herself up and trailed light kisses over the newly exposed skin. Her tender show of affection sent waves of pleasure throughout Michael's body. His hands restlessly moved over her as she leisurely undressed his arms and upper torso, caressing him with her lips as she went along. As she neared his waist, she slid onto the floor so that she could continue touching and kissing his abdomen. He wasn't expecting her to go any farther; however, she boldly pushed his coveralls past his hips and began stroking his throbbing arousal. He shuddered hard as she seductively drew its tip into her mouth. "Karen—" he groaned. She paused and glanced up at him. He quickly pushed her head forward, encouraging her to keep going. She obeyed his wordless request under his watchful eye.

Michael's want for Karen increased with every second that went by. Before he climaxed, he hoisted her back onto his lap, positioning her so she was facing him. Then, he guided her moist core over his hardness. An anxious expression suddenly appeared on her face as their bodies joined underneath her nightshirt. He leaned forward and grazed her lips with his. "Karen," he murmured, his voice husky with passion, "make love to me."

Although she still looked nervous, she drew his lips into a soft kiss. She moved against him—"hesitantly at first"—but as her passion increased, so did her speed. As difficult as it was, Michael remained submissive, allowing her to take from him what she needed.

When her movements eventually slowed, he flipped her onto her back so that he could seek his own release deep inside her. He ravished her mouth with his tongue, stifling her cries of ecstasy. Feeling her, tasting her sent him spiraling out of control. He knew he had to be hurting her with his vigorous—"almost brutal"—thrusts, yet he was unable to stop until his seed had been spilt.

By the time he finished, Karen's face was wet with fresh tears. He recalled that she had cried during their first time together, too. Sleeping with him definitely affected her more emotionally than physically, which made sense considering her father had obviously caused her more psychological pain than physical. That was why the killer didn't dare risk leaving her again anytime soon. She needed him with her—"now more than ever."

"Michael?"

He turned on his side, giving Karen his undivided attention.

"Would you mind holding me?" she asked.

"No, of course not." He quickly pulled his coveralls back up and then reached for his lover. She instantly snuggled into him.

"I've missed you, Michael," she confessed. "So much."

"I know." He brushed his knuckles over her cheek. "I've missed you, too."

A soft smile touched Karen's swollen lips as her eyelids fell closed. Feeling extremely exhausted himself, Michael soon joined his soulmate in a sound sleep.

15. August 20, 1997: Part 2

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

Johanna Johnson impatiently paced her bedroom floor, her cerulean eyes periodically glancing at the cordless phone sitting on the bed stand. Dawn had promised to call as soon as she and Michael reached Rebekah's house, yet Derek and Johanna still hadn't heard from her.

"I'm sure she'll be calling us any minute now," assured Derek from the bed. "It takes awhile to get to Waukegan from here."

Johanna looked at the blue digital numbers on her alarm clock. "Not this long. I hope she's okay."

"I'm sure she's fine."

Johanna's expression hardened. "Derek, what if she never made it out of the Myers house? Maybe you should go over there and check on things."

The cop drew out a long breath. "I'm sure Michael knows better than to kill his lover's best friend."

Instead of comforting her, Derek's words made Johanna cringe. She hated thinking of Michael Myers and Karen Miller as a couple, much less them sleeping together. "I still don't understand how Karen could get involved with a known serial killer in the first place," she stated.

"Maybe she didn't have a choice," suggested Derek.

Johanna felt the color drain from her face. "You don't think he forced himself on her, do you?"

"No, no," her husband quickly replied. "That's not what I meant." He stood up and said, "I have spent days reading Michael Myers' file, Johanna. He may be a vicious killer, but he never once sexually assaulted any of his female victims. It seems very unlikely that he

would start now."

"But do you truly believe he has developed feelings for Karen and vice-versa?"

"According to Dawn's and Eleanor's account of events, Karen and Michael have always shared a special bond with each other. And no one can deny that he has gone through great lengths to make sure she's well protected from her father."

"Yes, but Karen is a good person, Derek. What if her relationship with Michael somehow ends up compromising her integrity?"

Derek merely shrugged. "I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Johanna ran her fingers through her long golden locks. "Do you think we made a mistake by not telling Dawn what David has done to Karen?"

"No, definitely not," her husband answered. "That's Karen's place, not ours."

Johanna sighed. "You do realize it's going to be difficult explaining Dawn's absence to David."

Derek nodded. "Yes, I know. We'll just have to hope for the best."

The phone suddenly rang. Johanna was quick to answer it. "Hello?" she asked into the receiver.

"Hi, Mom," Dawn's voice replied.

"Thank heavens," Johanna breathed. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm not sure about Karen, though. Do you know what's wrong with her? Eleanor said something about withdrawal." Dawn paused for a short moment. "Mom, please tell me that Karen wasn't actually taking drugs."

"It's complicated, Dawn. Just don't judge Karen too harshly until she talks to you, okay?"

"_If _she decides to talk to me," Dawn said, sounding discouraged.

"She will," Johanna assured her. "Have you seen her, yet?"

"No, not yet. Michael is with her right now."

"I see," Johanna simply replied.

"Mom, it's not what you think. I know you don't approve of their relationship, butâ€"

"Dawn," Johanna quickly interrupted, "that man is preying on a very vulnerable seventeen-year-old girl, and it needs to stop."

The teenager let out a soft sigh. "Mom, you just don't

understand."

Johanna's temper started to rise. "Oh, and I suppose you do?"

"I didn't at first," admitted Dawn, "but after spending some time with Michael last night, I'm beginning to now."

Johanna clasped the receiver tighter in her fist. "Dawn, listen to me. You may trust him, but I don't. If you feel threatened by him in any way, I want you to come straight home. Understand?"

"Mom, I'm sorry," Dawn suddenly said, "but I have to go. Tell Dad I say hi."

"Dawn Renee, don't you dare hang up on me," warned Johanna, but she was already speaking to a dial tone. She angrily placed the phone back in its cradle and turned to her husband. "Derek"

"Let it go, Johanna," he said. "It sounds like you both just need time to cool down."

"You should have heard the way she was talking to me. I don't know what's come over her."

"She's growing up," Derek bluntly stated, "and now she's starting to look at the world through adult eyes, as is Karen." He took a deep breath. "Especially Karen. I can't imagine what she must be going through right now."

"Maybe we should go to Waukegan and visit her," suggested Johanna hopefully. "Then, we could bring Dawn back home."

Derek firmly shook his head. "That is completely out of the question, Johanna. I have done everything possible to conceal Karen's whereabouts from David, and I refuse to do anything that will risk her safety. From here on out, it will be up to Michael to protect both her and Dawn."

Appalled, Johanna stared at her husband. "So, what, we're just going to leave our daughter at the mercy of a serial killer?"

He responded by asking, "What other choice do we have?"

She sighed. "None, I suppose. I just wish things were...different. But there's no use wishing for the impossible, is there?" When Derek remained silent, she said, "Well, since there's nothing more we can do, we may as well try to get some sleep."

Johanna crawled into bed. Her husband followed suit. He draped an arm around her, but the affectionate gesture did little to ease her worries. She lay awake for quite some time, praying that Dawn and the other members of her family would be spared from Michael Myers' infamous wrath. Eventually, though, her eyelids fell closed, which allowed sleep to finally claim her.

16. August 21, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****August 21, 1997****

Karen awoke to find herself still enveloped in Michael's arms. She was facing him, her head comfortably pillowed on his shoulder. His obsidian eyes remained closed, even as she studied his ruggedly handsome features. She tentatively combed her fingers through his shoulder-length chestnut hair, taking notice of its uneven length. She assumed he had cut it himself at one point, presumably using his knife.

When Michael began to stir, Karen stilled her hand and watched him open his eyes. A light frown touched his lips as he met her steady gaze. "I thought you would still be asleep," he chastised.

The tinge of anger in his voice took her by surprise. "I just woke up," she hastily informed him.

"Did you at least sleep well?"

She nodded. "Very. I haven't slept that well in a while."

Michael's expression softened. "Nor have I," he admitted. Karen raised an eyebrow at him to which he said, "I told you I've missed you."

"Then why did you leave me?" She tried to keep the hurt out of her voice but failed.

He gave her a long look. "Because I felt someone besides her parents needed to watch over Dawn."

The teenager couldn't stop her mouth from dropping open, though she did manage to verbalize one word and that was a weak "oh".

"She means a lot to you," Michael continued, "and I know you wouldn't be able to handle losing her, at least not right now."

Karen quickly gathered her wits about her and asked, "She's here, isn't she?"

The killer silently nodded.

"You know, it is said that you do not have a conscious."

Michael propped himself on an elbow and traced her jaw line with the fingers of his other hand. "Every rule has an exception, Karen," he quietly voiced. "You are mine."

Her eyes drifted from him as she contemplated his statement.

"Karen, please tell me what you are thinking," he eventually commanded.

She sighed. "You are not like other men, Michael. I know there's a side to you I haven't seen, yet, and that frightens me."

A shadow crossed his face. "You know I won't ever hurt you."

Karen smirked and said, "Before last night I may have believe you."

"Sore?" he mildly asked.

"Very."

For the first time since she met him, Michael's eyes lit up with a trace of humor. "That's a little bit different, wouldn't you say?"

"Maybe," she replied, giving him a shy smile, "but I still think you should refine your definition of hurt."

Michael ran the pad of his thumb over her lips. "You have my deepest apologies for causing you so much pain, Karen," he sincerely said, "but I think I know something that will help."

Before she could ask any questions, the killer left the bed and headed straight to the bathroom. A few moments later she heard the sound of rushing water. "A bath?" she asked when he stepped back into the bedroom.

He gave his head a slow nod. "I thought we could both use one. Are you up for it?"

Despite what had occurred between her and her father, Karen knew they had never bathed together. This would be a first for her.

"Yes," she answered, already breathless with anticipation.

"Good."

Michael came to stand next to the bed and scooped her up in his arms. A startled cry escaped Karen's lips as she was effortlessly lifted from the mattress. She was half expecting him to comment about her weight, but, to her relief, he kept his thoughts on the matter to himself.

He carried her into the bathroom and set her down on the tan bathmat. He then turned off the tub's faucet. By the time his gaze returned to her, his eyes were ablaze with passion. Her stomach muscles tightened in response. He wordlessly hooked his fingers under the hem of her red nightshirt. Her nervousness peaked as he pulled the material up her body and over her head.

"Oh Karen," he muttered, sounding absolutely stunned. The passion in his expression instantly dissolved, leaving only concern in its wake.

At that moment the teenager wanted nothing more than to hide beneath the bubbles in the bathtub.

"I could tell that you had lost weight, but I didn't expect this," he said. "No wonder you're so sore. Why didn't you tell me to stop?"

"Because I needed last night," she replied, without embarrassment. "It's been a long two weeks for me, Michael."

He took hold of her hand and gave it an affectionate squeeze. "It will get better," he stated while helping her into the tub. "I promise."

When Michael moved away to undress, Karen sank down into the hot water. She moaned appreciatively.

"Feel good?" he asked.

She nodded. "But don't take my word for it."

He gave her a sharp look. "I don't plan to."

As he began unzipping his coveralls, she said, "You know, I could have helped you with that."

"Yes, but then I guarantee we never would have made it into the tub."

She grinned. "That wouldn't have been so bad, except the floor is kind of hard."

Michael cocked his head to the side. "Who said anything about the floor?" he asked, deadpan.

Karen had no idea how to respond to his question, so she let it slide by without a comment.

Once the killer stepped out of his clothes, he entered the bathtub behind her. He sat down and tugged her backwards until her head and back were leaning against his chest. Then, he folded their hands together and laid them on her stomach. He kept completely still, save for his fingers, which gently toyed with hers.

After a few minutes, Karen's tense and sore muscles finally started to relax. However, her eyes remained fixed on the door. She knew her father wasn't going to barge into the room, but she found it extremely difficult to break the nearly decade-old habit.

"It's probably been a while since you've soaked in a tub," guessed Michael.

She nodded. "I never took baths at home," she replied. "Just brief showers."

His fingers tightened around hers. She winced, and he immediately let go.

"Sorry," he muttered, sounding preoccupied.

She tilted her head upwards. The anger etched on his face was unmistakable. His black eyes stared straight ahead, dead focused on something she was unable to see. The sight of him in such a state unnerved her, and she could only think of one way to break the spell. Since she couldn't reach his mouth from her current position, she settled for kissing his neck.

"Karen, stop," he warned, his tone harsh. She paused and looked at him. This time he met her gaze. More tenderly he said, "I don't want

to hurt you."

"You won't," she firmly replied.

He sighed. "I just did."

"You startled more than hurt me."

His expression turned skeptical.

"My hands are fine, Michael. Really." To prove her point, she maneuvered them between their bodies. He drew in a sharp breath as she lightly touched his arousal. "See?" she asked in jest. "What did I tell you?"

"Dammit, girl," he growled, yet he did nothing to discourage her from continuing to touch him. "You enjoy this way too much."

His feeble complaint made the teenager smile. "It's called anger management, Michael," she teased.

He smirked. "If you plan to diffuse my anger with sex, Karen, then you'd better get accustomed to being sore."

Her eyes widened in mock horror. "Why, Mr. Myers, is that a threat?"

"No," he huskily replied, "it's a promise."

The killer then lunged at Karen with such speed that she had no time to react. Water plashed over the side of the tub as he fused their bodies together. They were both too worked up to make their unexpected tryst last longer than a few minutes.

Afterwards, Michael insisted on washing her hair, so the teenager was now sitting cross-legged in front of him as his fingers gingerly massaged her scalp.

"Karen, since we probably won't be able to abstain from having sex, I'm going to highly recommend that you look into some method of contraceptive."

His comment actually made her blush, not from embarrassment but from guilt. "I already have," she informed him. "I'm on the Pill. I figured it was for the best, all things considered."

"I see."

Karen frowned. "You're not angry, are you?"

"No. Now, tip your head back so I can rinse your hair."

She wordlessly obeyed. He filled a large cup with clean water from the faucet and then poured the warm water over her head. He repeated the process several times before announcing he was finished.

"Great," she said, stealing the cup from his hand. "Now it's my turn." Without waiting for a response, she scooted behind Michael. She raised herself on her knees and used the cup to wet his hair.

When she began shampooing his long locks, he released an audible sigh.

"It's amazing what a simple touch can do," he stated wryly.

She didn't need to glance down over his shoulder to know what he was referring to. "Again?" she asked.

He simply nodded.

She nervously licked her lips. "Now?"

"Only if you want to."

She didn't want to say no, but she didn't want to say yes either. Her body was just too sore to handle another round of their frantic love-making.

"Not right now," she finally stated. "I need a break."

Instead of making a flippant remark concerning their previous conversation, he stoically replied, "That's fine, Karen. I understand."

He may have understood, but she felt like such a tease, especially after the comments she had made earlier.

"Karen, are you all right?" he asked, clearly worried.

Her chest constricted tightly, but she refused to cry. In her opinion, he had seen enough of her tears. She crossly rubbed her eyes and then immediately swore. Michael swiftly turned. It only took a second for him to realize what had happened. Before she knew it, she was sitting sideways on his lap while he cupped handfuls of clean water into her shampoo-filled eyes. Once the stinging subsided, Karen slowly opened them. To her chagrin, she found herself staring into a pair of black orbs. "Thanks," she mumbled, uncertain of what else to say.

Michael gazed at her long and hard. When he finally spoke, his voice was stern. "Don't you ever _ever_ feel guilty about telling me no. Understand?"

She quickly nodded. "Yes, Michael."

He brushed his lips against her temple. "Good," he said, releasing her.

Karen hastily returned to her place behind her lover and dutifully rinsed the shampoo from his hair. Then, he stood. Upon exiting the tub, he snatched two large fluffy towels from the closest towel bar. He tied one towel around his waist. The other he unfolded and expectantly held it open for her.

The teenager carefully rose to her feet and stepped over the side of the tub. She walked into the towel, allowing the killer to securely wrap it around her. Once she was modestly covered, he strode to the vanity and grabbed her hair brush. He took the liberty of using it first. Something deep within her stirred as she watched him fluidly brushed his hair. Frustrated by the mixed signals her body was giving

her, she quickly left the bathroom, closing the door loudly behind her.

Karen didn't know how much time Michael would give her to be alone, so she practically ran to her dresser. She chose a matching set of undergarments from the top drawer. Then, she rushed to her closet. Without thinking, she slid a long turquoise and white floral printed sundress off its hanger. After she finished drying herself off, she hastily dressed. As she was slipping on a pair of white flats, she felt a pair of eyes burning into her. She turned to see her lover fully dressed and leaning against the bathroom's door jamb with her hair brush still in hand. The manner in which he was staring at her made her feel quite uncomfortable. Minutes of tense silence passed between them. "What?" she finally asked, her patience wearing thin.

He straightened and slightly raised the brush. "I want to comb your hair."

Karen sensed he wanted to say something else. She suddenly wondered what secret he was hiding. "Is that all?" she suspiciously questioned.

"Yes."

"Okay," she conceded. She sat down in a chair, away from her vanity. Michael approached her from behind and gently started to untangle her hair. While his fingers worked to unknot a particularly stubborn snarl, she recalled several times when her mother did the same thing. She clenched her eyes closed, forcing the painful memories from her mind. Michael's hands instantly stilled.

"Am I hurting you?"

Karen quickly reopened her eyes and shook her head. "No."

"Then am I to assume that something else is bothering you?"

She sighed. "I'd rather not talk about it."

Michael resumed his brushing, yet the tension in his hands told her that he was far from pleased with her curt response. She had already shared so much with him—more than she had shared with anybody—however, he, apparently, wanted her to bare her soul.

He deserves nothing less from you, her subconscious reprimanded.

It, of course, was right. Taking a deep breath, she said, "I was thinking about my mom."

"I should have known," the killer stated. "You like talking about her even less than you do your father."

"That's because I loved my mother, Michael," Karen quietly told him.

He was silent for a long moment, but then he asked, "Do you have any idea what happened to her?"

The teenager shook her head. "No, only what my father told me, but we both know how well he tells the truth."

Her partner scoffed. "Right."

She slightly turned her head so that she could see him. "What about your parents, Michael? Are they still alive?"

"No," he answered, never missing a beat. "They were killed in a car accident a couple of years after I was institutionalized at Smith's Grove."

"Oh," she said. "I'm sorry."

He shrugged. "It's of little consequence, Karen."

Michael's indifference actually surprised her. "So you don't miss them at all?"

His eyes narrowed. "Missing them would imply that I once loved them, which I never did." He must have seen the sorrow in her expression, because he instantly knelt in front of her. He set her hair brush aside and clasped her hands in his. "This is the side of me you were so afraid to meet, Karen. This is who I am."

"But they were your parents, Michael," she insisted. "They must have loved you."

"They did," he assured her, "but I was incapable of reciprocating their love."

"Yet you didn't kill them."

"Lack of apathy is not the same as rage, Karen. If it was, then the entire population of Haddonfield would have been wiped out by now."

She considered his words and nodded. "True, and it's been awhile since your last killing spree."

"Nearly nineteen years," he confirmed. "I haven't killed anyone since my youngest sister skipped town."

"Wait," the teenager demanded, confused. "You're talking about Laurie Strode?"

He nodded.

"I thought she was dead."

"No, Karen, she's still alive." He paused and then added, "But her time is coming."

"Soon?"

"Soon enough," Michael responded. When she frowned, he said, "Karen, you cannot let my actions weigh on your conscious. I am a killer by nature, and that is never going to change. If you cannot accept that, then I guarantee our relationship will not survive the long term."

"Michael, Iâ€" "

He instantly released her hands and put a finger to her lips. "Don't give me an answer now, Karen. I want you to think about this long and hard."

After he lowered his finger, the teenager asked, "And in the meantime?"

"I'll leave that up to you."

She sat in stunned silence as Michael rose to his full height.

"Come," he said, grabbing his mask. "You need to eat."

When she left the chair, he slipped the white latex over his face. The Boogeyman held the bedroom door open for her. She yearned for him to take her hand, but he left her untouched while they walked down the long corridor together. She stole several glimpses at her companion; however, he never once looked at her. She inwardly sighed. This was indeed the man she had been so frightened of, and he was right: if she was unable to accept him for who he was, then there was no point in them perusing a relationship with each other.

Michael had made it quite clear that he would never kill her, yet would she be able to handle him killing others? She honestly didn't know. On the other hand, the last thing she wanted to do was end their relationship, because she knew she wouldn't ever desire anyone like she desired him.

_Desire? _her inner voice snickered._ Don't you mean love?_

Karen missed a step, nearly tripping into the masked killer. His hands instantly reached out to catch her. "Sorry," she quickly apologized, mentally cursing her clumsiness. He hastily righted her, not looking at her or touching her any longer than was absolutely necessary. His behavior may have seemed cold and uncaring to anyone else, but she understood the reason behind it, for her own skin still tingled from his brief touch. "Is the chemistry between us always going to be _this_ strong?" she desperately asked him.

He shrugged as though saying, I'm afraid so.

"Yeah, that's what I figured," she said.

The Boogeyman continued towards the staircase. Karen trailed slightly behind him, wondering how on earth she was going to make a decision about their relationship with him around. He seemed to understand her dilemma, because once he reached the first floor, he strode directly to the front door. She wished she could tell him to stay, but right now she needed some time alone to think things through. Perhaps he did, too.

She stood back as the masked killer opened the door. For just a moment their eyes met. Then, he turned on his heels and vanished from view. With a heavy heart, the teenager pushed the door closed and latched it.

She still couldn't believe that within only a few short hours she and Michael had gone from making passionate love to now questioning their future together. However, just because they desired each other didn't mean they were right for one another. She appreciated all that he had done for her, but keeping him here when he could be out looking for someone else seemed very unfair. Then again, maybe that's what he was out doing right now. Her chest clinched tightly at the thought.

"Karen?"

The brunette turned at the sound of her best friend's voice.

Dawn hesitantly approached her. "Eleanor and I thought we heard you. Would you like to sit with us in the kitchen? She was hoping you might be a little hungry."

Although food was the last thing on Karen's mind, she nodded. She figured this would be a good time to tell both Eleanor and Dawn what was going on between her and Michael.

The platinum-haired girl breathed a sigh of relief. "Great. Come on."

As they walked, Karen couldn't help but notice a thin faint scar on Dawn's throat. She knew of only one person who would have left such a mark; however, she decided not to make mention of it. Instead, she silently followed her friend into the spacious kitchen. Eleanor was sitting at the breakfast bar, her features etched with worry. Dawn sat down across from her while the brunette remained standing.

"Karen, dear, please sit," the older woman gently commanded, gesturing to an open seat next to Dawn. "You look positively drained."

Karen wordlessly did as she was told. Eleanor then passed her a bowl of fruit and a fork. For the first time in days, the teenager ate.

"Now, would you like to tell me what happened?" Eleanor asked, though it sounded more like a demand.

"Michael left," the brunette bluntly answered between bites.

Eleanor impatiently sighed. "Yes, I know that, dear. What I want to know is why. Did you two have an argument?"

Karen shook her head. "No, but after learning a little more about him, I'm not sure if we're really meant to be together."

"Yes, you are," Dawn quickly interjected. "You two are soulmates. He's known that ever since he met you."

Eleanor's gray eyes narrowed. "Dawn, did he tell you that?"

"Well, not in so many words," she answered. "I mean, he hasn't spoken to anyone in years."

"He speaks to me," said Karen quietly.

"That's because you're special, dear," the older woman stated, "as I keep trying to tell you."

The brunette remained stern. "Eleanor, the only thing remotely special about me is that I was raped by my father when I was eight years old, and even then, I know I am not the only one out there who has been sexually molested by a family member. I'm sure there are many other girls whom Michael can play the hero to. What makes me any more special than them?"

Eleanor pursed her lips while Dawn jumped off her seat. "I knew it!" the teenager angrily screamed. "I knew it was your father! Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"Dawn..." her great-aunt warned.

"It's okay," Karen said. She faced her infuriated friend. "I'm sorry, Dawn. I should have told you long before this, but I honestly didn't see the point in opening that can of worms. To my knowledge, he never once touched me again after the rape."

"To your knowledge?" asked the blonde teenager.

Karen slowly nodded. "He started drugging me at night. That's why I kept losing weight and was never hungry."

"Oh my God," Dawn gasped. "And you seriously never knew?"

Karen shook her head. "I always thought I was dreaming about Michael."

This time Eleanor spoke. "Understandably so. Love is a very powerful bond, even at the age of eight."

The brunette couldn't help but scoff. "It wasn't love, Eleanor, trust me."

Dawn gave her friend a long look. "But even you said that both you and Michael had developed feelings for each other after your first meeting. "Besides," she added, "I know you wouldn't be sleeping with him unless you really loved him."

Karen's felt her cheeks redden. "Fine," she reluctantly conceded. "Maybe I have fallen in love with him."

"And he with you," Eleanor adamantly stated.

"No, Eleanor," said the brunette. "He doesn't love me, and I doubt he ever will."

The older woman instantly frowned. "What makes you say that, dear?"

Karen absently stabbed her last piece of cantaloupe with her fork. "Michael told me he never loved his parents."

"So?" Eleanor asked.

"So," the teenager continued, raising the utensil to her mouth, "if

he couldn't love them, then there's no way he could ever love me. He knows passion and desire, not love."

"I think you're wrong, Karen," Dawn softly voiced. "I believe he loves you very much."

The brunette finished her bite and sighed. "All right, let's say Michael does love me," she hypothesized. "It still doesn't change the fact that he's a killer."

"No, it doesn't," agreed Eleanor, "but you were chosen to be his companion for a reason. You cannot dismiss that simply because you are scared."

"So that's it?" Karen asked incredulously. "I'm just supposed to accept that he murders people without caring about the victims, one of whom was almost my best friend?" When the older woman didn't offer a response, the teenager irately stood to her feet. "I am not heartless, Eleanor!" she seethed. Then, she turned on her heels and stormed out of the kitchen.

Dawn quickly chased after her. "Karen, wait!" she exclaimed.

Instead of listening to her friend, the brunette raced back upstairs to the privacy of her bedroom. By the time she reached it, she was breathing extremely heavily, and her head was pounding painfully in her ears. She collapse to her knees as her headache intensified. She squeezed her eyes closed, begging the pain to stop. It bowed to her wishes but not before dragging her down into the dark abyss.

17. August 21, 1997: Part 2

The Shape stood on the beach, his black eyes staring out beyond the horizon of the Great Lake. His mind was in such a deep contemplative state he never once took notice of the gentle waves that were lapping onto the toes of his boots or of the hot August sun that was beating down on his head and shoulders. His relationship with Karen was in jeopardy, and he was trying his damndest to figure out a way to save it. At this point, he didn't know if it would even be possible without seriously compromising her entire value system. Despite what she had suffered through, she still remained a good person with wholesome values. Well, almost wholesome, he wryly thought.

The killer would have liked to blame Karen's insatiable sex drive on normal teenage hormones, but he knew her age had little to do with it. It seemed as though the drug her father had been giving her was not the only thing her body had grown addicted to over the years. Now that her body was experiencing the effects of drug withdrawal, it would crave sex even more, which partly explained her desperate need for him. And, if that wasn't enough, her mind and body were now clearly fighting for dominance, only adding more fuel to the fire.

However, regardless of all this, the Shape knew it was not solely addiction that drove her desire for him. Last night he had felt the difference in her soft kisses and gentle caresses, but this morning he had seen it shining brightly in her eyes. There was no mistaking it. Karen was completely in love with him. It scared her, but not as much it should have. She still had no idea of the evil that lay

within him. He hadn't killed anyone in her lifetime, so she never witnessed his sheer brutality firsthand or the devastation it caused upon those who had. He could be very creative when it came to killing his victims, and it was never pretty. The teenager would soon see it for herself. Only then would she truly know the Boogeyman—assuming she decided to stay with him.

The Shape knew with every fiber of his being that Karen was destined to be his soulmate, yet Fate, it seemed, had played a cruel trick on him. He had always anticipated that she would grow up tainted by what had happened to her as a child, perhaps developing a dark side of her own. However, that had not been the case. Instead, she had developed into a sweet, compassionate, and selfless young woman—a young woman who had stolen his presumably nonexistent heart.

Behind his mask, the killer tightly pursed his lips together. Would Karen ever be able to turn a blind eye to his violent nature, or would it end up destroying her? He'd like to believe that Fate would not have brought them together if the latter was true. Then again, maybe he was greatly underestimating her fortitude. After all, she had lost her mother at a tender age; a month later was raped by her father; for nearly a decade was subjected to drug and sexual abuse, again at the hands of her father; and now was suffering through the symptoms of withdrawal. Yet, up until two weeks ago, she had led a pretty normal life, which was saying a hell of a lot, considering she had still been living with the man who had raped her.

The Shape figured that would be equivalent to forcing Laurie Strode to live with him after he had murdered all her friends and almost her. Even if the killer had sworn to do nothing more to her, she still would have lived in constant fear of him. He doubted she would have survived the first year, much less ten, and that was without adding substance abuse into the mix. Yes, Karen was indeed much stronger than even he had realized. Her will to survive, alone, demanded respect.

Her father had been smart to drug her. Had she been consciously aware of his actions, the Shape was certain the cop would be dead by now. Even a good-hearted person like Karen could only be pushed so far until reaching a breaking point, and her anger, though pure in nature, would have given her the distinct advantage.

Her resentment towards her current situation had not gone unnoticed by the Shape, and it was quite obvious that her anger wasn't fully directed at her father either. Her blatant refusal to look upon her reflection in mirrors suggested she was aiming some of that anger at herself. Given her inner strength, he highly doubted she would ever act on those feelings; however, the fact that they were present at all still disturbed him.

_But not enough to stay with her, _ his subconscious chided.

The killer instantly looked in the direction of the mansion. Had leaving her been a mistake? He got his answer moments later when a stabbing pain in his chest brought him to his knees. He instinctively searched his coveralls for a bullet hole before realizing the real cause for the sudden pain.

KAREN!

The killer hastily straightened and closed his eyes. The sun's warmth disappeared from his shoulders as he materialized inside his lover's bedroom. Dawn and Eleanor were both kneeling on the floor in the doorway. In-between them lay Karen's lifeless body. His heart stopped. Was she dead?

The older woman instantly raised her head and looked at him. "She's not dead," she said, guessing his thoughts, "at least not yet."

The Shape quickly crossed the room. Eleanor wisely moved out of his way so that he could kneel next to his lover. Dawn, however, remained stationary, clearly reluctant to leave her friend. Her presence did not bother him, so he let her stay.

He checked Karen's body for any marks that could explain her unconscious state. When he didn't find any, he quickly surmised that her body had finally reached rock bottom and that this was its way of dealing with the pain. His own body reacted to pain in a similar way, but he never fell completely unconscious, and his bouts never lasted more than a few minutes. However, it looked as though Karen was going to remain in her current condition for some time. That being the case, the best thing anyone could do for her now was just to keep her comfortable.

The Shape gathered his lover in his arms and rose to his full height. As he put her to bed, Eleanor asked Dawn to leave the room. Then, the older woman walked to his side. He looked at her expectantly.

"I can't believe the difference you've had on her in less than a day, Michael," she said.

The killer's eyes strayed to Karen's unconscious form. She suddenly looked so young. _That's because_ _she is_, his inner voice gallingly reminded him.

"She's only seventeen," Eleanor stated, again correctly reading his thoughts. "You can hardly blame her for being scared and confused."

Seventeen—the same age his sisters were when he had attacked them. In fact, a majority of his victims had been female teenagers—a few of whom had been scantily dressed or not dressed at all. One, ironically also named Karen, had gone so far as to kiss his fingers, thinking he was her lover. Even then, the only feeling her affectionate touch provoked within the Shape had been rage. All he had wanted to do was melt the skin off her pretty face, which he, of course, had done. Had _his_ Karen acted in such a manner, she would have been laying on her back so fast it would have made her head spin. That's because she possessed one thing no one else ever had, and that was his love.

Yes, he loved Karen—more than anything—even killing. Yet killing remained a necessity, and he couldn't give it up, not even to save their struggling relationship. However, he knew he would always love her; therefore, he could guarantee that she would never fall victim to his rage, no matter what ended up happening between them.

"Michael," the older woman sharply continued, interrupting his wayward thoughts, "please don't give up on her. She needs you

here."

The Shape glared at Eleanor from behind his mask. Did she really think he'd leave his lover while she was in this condition? Surely not! He definitely had more sense than that. To prove his point, he sat down on a chair next to the bed and sternly pointed to the door.

Eleanor nodded knowingly and then turned to leave. "Good day, Michael," she said on her way out.

Once the door closed, the Shape took off his mask and drew out a long breath. Michael quickly concluded that living with the Helms was going to be more challenging than he had originally thought. For a moment he entertained the idea of finding both Karen and Dawn somewhere else to live, but he had no means of providing for them. Even his own house had little to offer besides shelter. He was able to survive on very little, whereas two female teenagers had certain needs that extended beyond just food and clothes. They had everything they needed here, and then some. Moving them to another location at this time would be selfish on his part, especially since the Helms were not in any immediate danger of his rage. And, as long as the girls stayed with him, they were not in danger of Karen's father's vengeance.

Even so, his lover was still living in fear of her father, as evident by her decision to start taking birth control pills. Michael knew better than to believe that she was taking them for his benefit alone. However, knowing that he couldn't get her pregnant right now did put his mind at ease. He just wished he could do more to eliminate her fear, besides going back to Haddonfield and killing her father. Although that would currently solve a lot of problems, in the long run, it would only do more harm to her than good. At some point she would return to their hometown to face her father once and for all. The question was, would she choose to confront him alone? The killer supposed that depended on whether she decided to continue their relationship.

He glanced down at the white lifeless face lying on his lap. He wore the mask to distance himself from the rest of humanity. However, Karen was the last person he wanted to distance himself from, which is why he rarely wore it while in her presence. It wasn't a coincidence that he hadn't been wearing it when he had first laid eyes on her. In hindsight, that had been Fate's way of showing him that she was different from any other individual he had come across in his lifetime. At the time, though, he had been more concerned with her well-being to take notice of anything else. It hadn't been until following her to Mrs. Hekman's house when he finally realized what Fate had known all along.

Michael remembered that afternoon like it had happened yesterday. Seeing people in distress was nothing new to him, but the look of pure anguish on her face touched him like nothing else ever had. If she would have just screamed at some point during her ordeal, he would have heard her. Yet even then, he doubted he would have found her in time to have stopped her father. And who knows what the cop would have done to her if she had screamed. The killer may have then stumbled upon a more horrific crime scene than he'd really care to imagine. Harassing teenagers was one thing; harassing children was completely another. Not even he dared to tread along that

path.

Young children instinctively feared the Boogeyman, so harming them was unnecessary. However, by the time they reached puberty, hormones usually overshadowed that particular fear, making them much more susceptible to attacks. Adults, though, were the easiest prey of all, for most had stopped believing in the Boogeyman all together. Common sense told them that a such a being was nothing more than a figment of their overactive imaginationâ€”until it was too late. After all, monsters hiding in the dark was something only children believed in.

Then, there was Karen, who had grown up fearing someone else entirely. She had always known of the Boogeyman's existence, and perhaps had even feared him at one point. However, the instant her father's motives had become clear to her, Michael had ceased to be her Boogeyman. He still could have claimed her as one of his victims later in life, but his immediate fondness for her made that impossible. Instead, he had claimed her as his lover, unknowingly turning her reality upside down. Did he regret sleeping with her that afternoon in the barn? No. To be honest, he wasn't sure how much longer she would have survived living with her father. A normal human body, no matter how strong, could only endure so much abuse before finally shutting down.

Michael stared at Karen, suddenly realizing that there was a chance she wouldn't come out of this coma-like state. He immediately left his seat to sit on the bed next to her lifeless body, allowing his mask to drop unceremoniously to the floor. At the moment he didn't wish to be reminded of the one thing that was driving their relationship apart.

Somehow, Michael had to let his lover know that he was with her and that he needed her to come back to him. He whispered in her ear, but unlike the previous night, she gave no indication that she had heard him or was even aware of his presence. Knowing there wasn't anything more he could do to save her, the killer picked up his mask and returned to his chair where he inevitably waited for his lover to awaken or to die. Either way, she was in Fate's hands now.

18. August 24, 1997: Part 1

****THREE DAYS LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****August 24, 1997****

The darkness finally relinquished its deathly grip on Karen. As she began gaining consciousness, she felt Michael's presence nearby. She wanted him to know that she wasn't going to leave him and that she had heard the words he had spoken to her, even though she had been too lost within the blackness to respond. His declaration of love had given her the willpower to fight for her life instead of succumbing to the darkness, which, at moments, had almost consumed her.

"Michael!" she cried out through the fog. Her voice sounded distant in her ears, making her wonder if she had merely dreamed saying his

name. She tried again in a desperate attempt to reach out to him. "Michael!" Relief flooded into her when she felt him grab her hand. His fingers tightly hugged hersâ€"almost painfullyâ€"yet she did not complain for fear he would let go.

"I'm here, Karen."

The sparks his touch ignited renewed her physical strength just enough for her eyelids to slowly open. Her lover's pale face immediately filled her vision. Right away she noticed the dark rings under his eyesâ€"a tell-tale sign of stress and sleep deprivation. "You look exhausted, Michael."

"You've been unconscious for three days, Karen, and, honestly, they have been pure hell for me," he openly admitted. "I wasn't sure ifâ€" He grunted and ran a hand through his hair in obvious agitation.

"If I was going to die," the teenager softly finished.

"Yes." He abruptly released her hand and rose to his feet. He paced a few steps. When he turned back around, his obsidian eyes pierced hers. "Karen, Iâ€" He paused in midsentence, as though he was trying to find the right words to say.

"I heard what you said before," she kindly offered, hoping to help. "I know that you love me."

He slowly shook his head, still looking strangely flustered. "It's more than that, Karen. Much more. During these past few days I have felt emotions I was certain I was incapable of feeling. There was a moment yesterday when I thought you had stopped breathing, and I actually felt scaredâ€"_scared_â€"that I had lost you." He gave his head another shake. "I now know that if you ever were to die, it would destroy me. As unfair as this is to you, I cannot let you go."

Tears stung Karen's eyes. "Michael, I'm not going anywhere, I promise. It's your love that kept me alive," she earnestly told him. "Nothing else mattered to me except coming back to you. I love you so much." She sighed deeply and then said, "At times it becomes very overwhelming."

Michael returned to the bed, reclaiming the spot next to her legs. "Karen, I wish I could make this easier for you; I really do, but I just can't."

She nodded in understanding. "I know."

He leaned over and leisurely kissed her. The passion his touch kindled was different than anything she had experienced with him so far, yet she still found herself pushing him away. "Michael, stop!" she frantically pleaded. "I haven't taken my pills since Wednesday night!"

"Yes, you have," he evenly informed her. "Eleanor made sure of it. According to her, knocking you up right now would not be a very gentlemanly thing for me to do."

Karen pursed her lips together, trying her best not to smile or

laugh, but she failed on both counts.

"I'm glad you find that so amusing." Michael may have sounded annoyed; however, the raw heated passion smoldering within his back eyes betrayed his true feelings.

He undressed like a man possessed and then joined her underneath the duvet. She yearned to touch him, but her close encounter with death had left her weaker than she'd cared to admit. "Michael, I can'tâ€" "

He kissed the side of her mouth, silencing her. "Relax, Karen," he huskily commanded. "Just keep still and let me love you."

"All right, Michael," she said, submitting herself to him.

In response, he snaked his arms around her back and leisurely began unzipping her sundress. Every time his fingertips grazed her skin it sent shivers down her spine. She shifted uncomfortably. He instantly gave her a sharp look as though warning her not to move again.

He then unhooked her bra. He simultaneously slid both her dress and bra straps down her arms, baring her torso in the process. He kissed her face, neck, and shoulders as his hands tenderly caressed her breasts. Eventually, his mouth replaced his hands. Starting with her right breast, he tugged her hard nipple between his teeth and gently suckled it. She closed her eyes as she absorbed the pleasure that was building up within her body.

When his lips moved to her left breast, he shifted his lower body closer to hers and pressed the tip of his arousal against her wetness. The material of her dress and panties prevented him from entering her, but the sensations it created brought her to a strong orgasm. She felt him smile against her breast, which alleviated her fear that she had come too quickly.

After her orgasm subsided, Michael's lips continued to travel southward. His tongue circled her navel while his hands pushed her dress farther down her legs. Once she was fully unclothed, he slid his hands up to her bare backside. His fingers kneaded her flesh as his face hovered over her womanhood. Realizing his intentions, Karen suddenly became self-conscious of the fact that she hadn't bathed in a few days. Yet, the moment his hot breath touched her, nothing else mattered to her but the steady movements of his mouth while it intimately explored her inner folds. It wasn't long before his lips, tongue, and teeth sent her spiraling out of control.

Just when she thought Michael's love-making couldn't get any more intense, he started touching her from behind. Within minutes, her entire body convulsed against him, releasing more of its womanly juices into his mouth. He slowly lapped them up, causing her to reach the brink of yet another orgasm. However, just before she peaked, he raised his head and latched his mouth onto hers. Tasting her own juices on his lips was enough to topple her right over the edge.

Michael waited for the last of her tremors to cease before completely covering her body with his. Then, he grabbed a hold of her hands and gradually eased his length into her womanhood. Once he was entirely sheathed inside her, he stopped moving all together, which allowed

her to feel the full extent of his manhood pulsating deep within her body. The sensation was so powerful it made her orgasm without any extra assistance from the killer. As her body found its release, her inner muscles contracted so tightly around his thickness they forced him to climax as well.

"Hot damn," he muttered into her hair as he poured his seed into her.

They laid together for a long time, each too sated and stunned to move. Finally, Karen gave her lover a friendly shove. "Michael, you're getting too heavy," she breathlessly told him.

He instantly propped himself on his forearms, relieving the pressure from her chest. He stared down at her with an expression on his face that was reminiscent of the one he had bestowed upon her shortly after their bath. "You're so beautiful, Karen," he sincerely proclaimed.

So that was his big secret. Instead of being flattered, the teenager sadly shook her head. "It's been a long time since I've considered myself pretty, Michael," she truthfully confessed. "I'm sorry."

A shadow crossed his features. "So am I."

The killer rolled off Karen and left the bed. She instantly frowned. "Michael, I didn't mean to make you angry," she said, her tone apologetic.

He looked genuinely surprised by her statement. "I'm not angry," he assured her.

He dressed and then walked over to her closet. He pulled its doors open. He ducked inside and began shifting through the row of hangers. "Someone's got good taste," he commented.

"That would be Rebekah, Dawn's aunt. Have you met her, yet?"

"No, but I'm sure I willâ€”sooner rather than later, I expect."

The killer emerged holding a hanger. He promptly showed it to the teenager. From it dangled a short black cocktail dress. She raised an eyebrow at him. "You seriously want me to wear that?" she asked incredulously.

"Very much so," he huskily replied. After laying the dress across the back of a chair, he reached for his mask on the bedside table.

Karen stared at her lover, desperately trying to figure out what he was scheming, "May I ask where you are going?"

"To fetch Dawn," he said. "She can help you get ready. You two could probably do with some girl time, anyway." He planted a chaste kiss on her lips. "Come downstairs at six," he ordered. "And don't forget to take your pill."

"I won't," she promised, grateful for the reminder.

Once masked, the Boogeyman briskly strode out of the bedroom, leaving the teenager alone with her confused thoughts.

19. August 24, 1997: Part 2

Dawn aimlessly wandered about the first floor of the aunt and uncle's mansion, her thoughts so jumbled she couldn't think straight. Finally, she walked into her uncle's private study and closed the door behind her. Although her relatives were currently trying to limit both incoming and outgoing phone calls, she could no longer fight the urge to call her boyfriend.

Kyle had left for college at the end of July in order to find a part-time job before school started, and Dawn was really starting to miss him. They hadn't spoken with each other much since he left, mainly because he spent most of his free time off campus working. Her hope was to go to attend a college near him, but now she wasn't sure if she'd even be able to finish high school. _So much drama,_ she mentally fumed, _and all because David Miller couldn't keep his hands off his own flesh and blood. Sick._

Dawn picked up the phone and quickly dialed Kyle's dormitory's number. An unfamiliar male's voice answered. She assumed it belonged to Kyle's roommate Joel. "Hello?" it asked.

"Uh, hi," she stammered. "Is this Joel?"

"Yeah."

"Is Kyle around?"

"Kyle? Yeah. He's finishing up in the shower. Is this Tracy?"

"Tracy?" Dawn repeated, stunned. "No, this is Dawn. _His girlfriend._"

The guy laughed. "Yeah, yeah, that's what they all say, baby. I'll get him for you."

The blonde teenager could barely muster a "thank you" through her constricted throat. Joel set the phone down, making it easier for her to hear his and Kyle's conversation.

"Hey, Love Machine! Your girlfriend's on the phone!" Joel called.

"Which one?" Kyle's voice distantly replied.

"Someone named Dawn. She sounds hot!"

"Shit," she heard Kyle hiss as he neared his phone. She was about to lay her receiver back on the cradle when he hastily said, "Dawn, sweetheart, please don't hang up. We were only kidding around. Guys do that, you know."

"Not all guys," she angrily told him, particularly referring to Michael Myers. "So who's Tracy?"

"Oh, sweetheart, she's nobody. Really. We just work together. She was supposed to be calling me for a shift change. That's why Joel thought

you were her."

"I see," Dawn said, not convinced. "Well, I'd hate to tie up your line if you're expecting another call. I'll talk to you later, Kyle."

"No, wait, Dawn," he pleaded. "Please don't go. You sound really upset."

"I am," she snarled. "I didn't need this today."

"Okay, listen, I'm sorry. I really am. I promise to make it up to you when I come back to Haddonfield."

"I'm not in Haddonfield," Dawn spitefully blurted out before thinking better of it.

She suddenly caught movement out of the corner of her eye and cringed. _Crap,_ she thought, briskly turning around. _Michael._ Sure enough, the Boogeyman had entered the room and was now standing against the back wall. The tension in stance did not go unnoticed.

"You left Haddonfield?" Kyle asked, not knowing that his girlfriend's attention had suddenly been diverted. "Why? What happened?"

"It's a long story," she stated, never taking her eyes off the Boogeyman. To her relief, he remained stationary. She put a hand over the receiver and said, "I'm talking to my boyfriend. Did Karen wake up?" She received a sharp nod.

"Karen?" she heard Kyle ask through her palm. "Dawn, what's going on? Is everything okay?"

The Shape's steady gaze shifted to the phone. After a moment, he gestured for the teenager to continue her conversation.

Dawn quickly raised the receiver back over ear. "Karen's been sick, but I think she's doing better nowâ€¦" She looked at the Boogeyman for direction. When he nodded, she breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Yeah, she's doing better. Thank goodness."

"I'm guessing it was pretty serious, huh?"

"Serious?" Dawn repeated.

This time the Shape didn't offer a response, as though he was recalling just how close they had come to losing her best friend.

"Yeah," she replied, "it was. She's been sick for awhile now, and it finally caught up to her."

There was a pause on Kyle's end. At last he asked, "Is she the reason you're not in Haddonfield right now?"

Dawn cast a nervous glance at the serial killer. He met her gaze and held it. As much as she yearned to share with Kyle all that had happened since he left for college, she decided now was not the time. She broke her eye contact with the Boogeyman and said, "I'm really

not at liberty to say."

"Is there someone else in the room with you?" Kyle asked, sounding worried. "Is that why you can't talk?"

"Yes, and sort of. I'm with Karen's boyfriend."

Stunned silence filled the phone line. At long last Kyle finally spoke. "Since when did Sheriff Miller give her permission to date?"

"He didn't," said Dawn. "It just happened."

"And he's okay with it?"

"No, definitely not."

"Is that why you're not in Haddonfield? She ran away with her boyfriend, and you went with her for moral support?"

The teenager sighed. "Not exactly."

"But she did leave home."

"Yes, but not for that reason."

Another long pause. "Dawn, did Sheriff Miller do something to her?" Kyle asked.

The blonde girl remained quiet, not trusting her voice.

"Dawn, sweetheart, if he did, you need to do something about it. He can't be allowed to get away with something like that, cop or not."

"I know," she said.

"You said she's doing better now though?"

"That's what I've been told."

"Ah, boyfriend taking precedence over best friend, huh?" Kyle asked.

"Yeah," Dawn reluctantly admitted.

"Must be some guy to have swept Karen off her feet."

She eyed the killer and said, "You have no idea."

"Well, just as long as he's not the Boogeyman..."

Dawn could hear the smile behind Kyle's words; however, she remained serious. "Well, on that note, I'd better go."

"Sweetheart, I was only joking," he stated. "I mean everyone knows Michael Myers is dead."

The Shape must have heard Kyle through the receiver because he instantly stepped closer to the blonde teenager. She instinctively

held up and arm to stop him, unsure of his intentions. He paused and looked at her. "Not everyone, Kyle," she sternly told her boyfriend.

The Boogeyman awarded her with a curt nod of approval. Then, he started walking to the door.

"Shit. Dawnâ€" "

"I have to go, Kyle," she hastily interrupted. "Karen's boyfriend is growing impatient with me."

"Dawn, wait," he pleaded. "At least tell me that you're okay."

"As much as I can be under the circumstances," she truthfully answered.

"All right, Dawn, but you be careful, you hear? I don't want anything bad to happen to you. I love you."

She heard Joel snicker in the background. She figured Kyle must love her to risk humiliation from his roommate. "I love you, too, Kyle," she said. "Take care."

"You, too, sweetheart. Bye for now."

"Bye." Dawn pressed the 'off' button on the handset and returned it to the cradle. Then, she joined the Boogeyman at the door. He gave her a hard stare.

"Okay," she conceded, "I'm sorry I called Kyle without your permission. I just really needed to talk to him." When the killer didn't respond, she tried another tactic. "He's a good guy, Michael."

His black eyes narrowed as he continued to study her.

"Please trust my judgment, Michael," Dawn begged. "Karen's my best friend. I would never do anything to risk her livelihood. Surely you know that by now."

At long last, the Boogeyman relented and opened the door for the teenager. He let her pass through the threshold first.

"Thanks," she said, surprised by his chivalry.

He simply nodded.

"So I take it I may see Karen now?" she asked.

He repeated the affirmative head movement; however, this time the motion was slightly more vigorous.

Dawn began walking toward the main staircase. When she didn't hear the killer's footsteps follow, she stopped and turned around. Sure enough, he was nowhere to be seen. She shook her head in exasperation. _Damn Boogeyman,_ she mentally cursed.

"Excuse me, Miss Johnson?"

Dawn jumped in spite of herself. Standing in front of her was Patrick, her aunt and uncle's butler.

"I'm sorry for startling you, Miss," he said with an apologetic smile, "but if you're going upstairs, I can take you in the elevator."

"Yes, thank you."

After they stepped into the small lift, the teenager asked, "You didn't happen to see Michael Myers pass by here, did you?"

The middle-aged man shook his. "No, Miss Johnson. I'm sorry."

"No problem, Patrick. I was just wondering."

He gave her a hard look as the elevator came to a stop. "Be careful around him, Miss. I'd hate to see you get hurt."

"Thank you, Patrick," she politely replied. "I will consider your advice."

"Yes, of course," he said. "Good day, Miss Johnson."

"Good day, Patrick."

The two quickly parted ways. Dawn rolled her eyes, knowing full well that Michael would never intentionally harm her—*not* after witnessing the remorse in his expression after he had cut her throat. Now, she just had to explain that to Karen. *Leave it to her to notice the barely visible scar,* she tersely thought.

The blonde girl reached her friend's room and soundly knocked on the door.

"Come in!" Karen called.

For someone who had been on her deathbed for the past three days, her voice sounded unusually strong. Dawn swung the door open and immediately got the answer as to why. Instead of lying on her bed, the brunette was standing in the center of her room, her skin nearly as pink as her terrycloth bathrobe she was wearing. Dawn awkwardly stared at her friend, knowing full well what had caused the radiant glow in Karen's otherwise pale complexion.

"Listen, Dawn, I'm really sorry for the way I acted the other day," said the brunette, clearly misunderstanding the reason behind the blonde teenager's discomfort, "and I don't blame you for still being upset with me."

Dawn hastily shook her head and replied, "No, that's not it at all."

Karen's dark eyes narrowed. "Then what's the matter? You're looking at me like I suddenly grew two heads."

"Karen, you almost died!" Dawn gasped, genuinely astounded by her friend's blatant disregard for the obvious. "There is no way you should be up and walking around right now. Being with Michael is changing you. Can't you feel it?"

The brunette shook her head in denial. "No, Dawn," she firmly said. "I am still the same person I was before I met Michael. Nothing has changed."

"_Everything_ has changed," the blonde girl insisted, "but I suppose that's only natural given what's happened. Speaking of which, are you doing okay?"

Karen merely shrugged. "What about you? How are you doing?"

"Truth? I'm starting to feel a little homesick," Dawn admitted. "Don't get me wrong my aunt, uncle, and Eleanor are great people to live with, but they just aren't my parents."

Karen's expression suddenly darkened. "Have you been able to speak to them at all since you got here?"

Dawn nodded. "Once, with my mom. She was worried about me traveling alone with Michael, so I called her soon after we arrived."

"I don't blame her for being worried," Karen stated, warily eyeing the blonde girl's neck.

Dawn self-consciously touched the small scar. "Michael never meant to attack me, Karen. We were trying to deduce who had molested you when he suddenly just snapped." She paused and then said, "It was purely an accident."

"That's exactly why I'm so upset, Dawn," Karen told her. "Michael told me his entire reason for leaving me here and returning to Haddonfield was to give you added protection."

"Yeah, I know," said Dawn. "He watched me like a hawk."

The brunette impatiently sighed. "My point is despite his good intentions to protect you, his anger still overpowered him. The next time he snaps he could easily kill you, accident or not. I just want you to be very careful around him, that's all."

Dawn stared at her friend in shock. "Are you saying you don't trust him?"

"I trust that he will never kill me, Dawn," Karen sternly answered, "but I don't know his character well enough to trust him any farther than that. I'm sorry."

"Fair enough," the blonde teenager said.

"Also, for you safety, please refrain from talking about my father when he's around. As you already found out, that's kind of a touchy subject with him, and I'm sure it's worse now that he knows basically everything."

Dawn raised her eyebrows at her friend. "_Basically?_"

Karen slowly nodded. "There are some details not even the Boogeyman needs to know, specifically concerning the last night I spent with my father."

The platinum-haired girl gave the brunette a long look. "My mom told me that she had given you the option of coming here instead of going back home that night."

"She did, but if I had taken her up on that offer, I would still be oblivious to my father's actions. This way at least I know so I can deal with it." Karen released a heavy sigh. "I just wish you and your family hadn't been dragged into this mess. I'm really sorry, Dawn."

"It's not your fault, Karen," Dawn firmly stated. "None of this is. We all know who is to blame, and, trust me, it isn't you."

"I know," the brunette said. "I just feel bad, because I know you must be missing more than just your parents."

Dawn felt her cheeks flush. "If you're speaking of Kyle, then, yes, I do miss him, too."

"Have you been able to talk to him at all since he moved to Georgia?"

"Not as much as I would like," Dawn admitted. "He's been too busy working."

Karen's dark eyes instantly lit up. "Oh, so he found a job?"

Dawn frowned. "Yes, at a pizza joint off campus."

A look of confusion passed over her friend's features. "You don't seem too happy about it."

"Karen, the whole reason Kyle wanted to start working was so that he could afford to buy me a ring at some point."

"_A ring?_" Karen gasped. "As in an engagement ring?"

Dawn sighed. "Yeah. We've been talking about getting married once we both finish college."

The brunette's face fell. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because it was only talkâ€"we both knew that a lot could happen within five years." _Like Tracy, _she bitterly thought.

Karen walked to the foot of her bed and slowly sank down onto the mattress, once again looking like the seventeen-year-old girl Dawn had known for the past nine years. "You need to call him, Dawn, and tell him what's happened."

The blonde teenager sat down next to her friend. "I did call him, just a little while ago in fact, but I wasn't able to tell him everything I had wanted to."

"Why? What happened?" the brunette asked, worried.

"Your boyfriend is what happened," Dawn sourly replied. "I hate how he can just appear out of nowhere. It's an infringement of privacy."

Karen's lips twitched as though she was trying hard not to smile.

"It's not funny," the blonde girl complained.

"Okay, Dawn, I'll talk to him about it," Karen said, "but on one condition."

Dawn's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Oh, and what's that?"

The brunette offered her a shy smile. "That you help me get ready for my date with Michael tonight." She pointed to a black dress draped over a chair. "He wants me to wear that."

Dawn rose to her feet and walked over to the chair. She inquisitively held the garment up to her body. The skirt of the dress just grazed her kneecaps, and she stood a good three inches shorter than her friend. Not only had Karen inherited her father's good looks, but she had also inherited his tall height.

"Michael must really like your legs," Dawn commented, returning the dress to the chair. "So what do you need my help with?"

"Well, I've never been on a date beforeâ€" Her friend's cheeks flushed in embarrassment. "I guess I just want to look nice for Michael," she meekly finished.

Dawn nodded in understanding. "Of course you do. I'll go and find Aunt Rebekah. I'm sure she'll be able to help us."

"Great," Karen replied, grinning. "That will give me a chance to freshen up a bit."

While the brunette headed to the bathroom, Dawn exited the bedroom in search of her aunt.

20. August 24, 1997: Part 3

Dinner for two â€" in the sunroom at 6 PM sharp.

Menu WILL include two steaks: one rare, one mid-well.

>Place a vase of freshly picked flowers on the table.

>And at no point shall we be disturbed. I have a knife.

M. Myers

Eleanor and Rebekah stared at the hand written note lying on the kitchen counter, their eyes wide in wonderment.

"A date, huh?" the older woman mused. "Who would have thought Michael Myers to be a romantic?"

"A real romantic, Eleanor," Rebekah tersely replied. "He threatened to kill us."

"Only if we disturb them, which, of course, we won't."

"I still don't understand how Karen could have fallen for a serial

killer," the younger woman said, turning her back on the note.

"Do not underestimate her, Rebekah. She is more than what she seems."

"Perhaps so, but I doubt _she_ would murder us in our beds."

"Oh there you are, Aunt Rebekah," her niece voiced as she bounded into the kitchen. "I've been looking all over for you. Karen and I need your help with something." The teenager's gaze suddenly landed on countertop between the two adults. "Hey, what's that?" she inquired, peering at the small piece of paper.

"A listâ€"from Michael," Eleanor answered.

Dawn's pale eyes scanned the note. A faint smile appeared on her lips when she finished reading it.

"You find that funny?" Rebekah asked, aghast.

"Well, I think the last part was actually meant for Karen..."

"Dawn!" Rebekah hissed. Eleanor just chuckled.

"Sorry," the blonde girl muttered. "But on the bright side, at least he used ink and not blood."

Exasperated, Rebekah asked, "Did you say you needed my help with something?"

"Yeah, and actually it has to do with Michael's note. I need help getting Karen ready for her dateâ€"you know, hair and make-up and stuff. Michael already picked out the dress."

The blonde-haired woman sighed. "All right, Dawn, come along. We will see you later, Eleanor."

The older woman simply nodded, still looking amused.

* * *

><p>Eleanor was not the only one whose expression was filled with amusement. Leave it to a horned-up teenager to turn a serious threat into vulgar joke, the Shape thought to himself. Still, he had almost laughed out loud right along with Eleanor.

Rebekah, on the other hand, had not taken his threat lightly at all. She had exhibited the most fear out anyone he had come across so far, and she had yet to meet him face-to-face. He would definitely have to watch himself around her. Fear triggered his killer instinct more than anything else.

Unsurprisingly, everyone living in the mansion responded to him differently. Eleanor abided by his wishes out of respect more than fear; Dawn seemed very determined to keep testing her limits with him, although she knew first-hand what pushing his patience too far could lead to; and Karen, in his opinion, wasn't testing her limits far enough, seeing as though she was the only person who remained truly safe from his rage.

The Shape shook his head, trying hard not to let his thoughts linger too long on his lover. The constant sound of water running throughout the pipes indicated she was in the midst of taking a shower, and if he thought about her hard enough, he knew he would end up in the stall with her. Although he wouldn't mind the diversion, he understood that she still had a lot to do before his six o'clock deadline.

Enough, Michael, his inner voice sternly warned. He nodded in agreement and quickly left the kitchen—only to be drenched in water a moment later.

"MICHAEL! What the hell?!" Karen shrieked.

The Shape stared at his lover. She looked genuinely distressed by his unexpected arrival. He then noticed that she was holding a shaver in her hand.

"Michael," she sternly said, "please leave."

Instead of conforming to her harsh demand, he reached a hand out and brushed the tip of his fingers against her newly shaved thigh. She jumped when his flesh touched her soft skin. Was she scared? He studied her face, hard. No, she definitely was not scared. She was embarrassed. But why? It wasn't like he had never seen her naked before. There had to be another reason.

As his fingers inched their way toward the juncture of her thighs, Karen's anxiety increased. He continued to carefully watch her, knowing that she was armed with an object that could easily turn into a weapon, if she so desired. Granted, he could disarm her just as easily, but the fact that she could cause him harm at any moment really turned him on.

Damn, he wanted her.

He bent his head to kiss her lips when he suddenly remembered he was still wearing his mask. He hastily shed it, tossing it carelessly aside. She wasn't quite ready for that yet, and in all honesty, neither was he.

Once free from the confines of his mask, his mouth found hers. His kiss was far from gentle, driven by deep passion and love. While he forced his tongue between her teeth, his fingers quickly discovered the cause for her embarrassment, though why she was so self-conscious about it was beyond him. Her smooth womanhood felt amazing. Too amazing.

He hastily unzipped his coveralls, hoisted Karen into his arms, and plunged himself into her. She hooked her legs around his waist as he helped her catch his rhythm, optimizing their pleasure. As the tension in her body built, she wrapped her arms around his neck, which caused the blade of her razor to inadvertently nick his skin.

The pain, though slight, sent Michael spiraling out of control. He pushed Karen up against the side wall, forcing himself even farther into her. He faintly heard her razor hit the stall's tile floor over her soft moans and his heavy breathing. Now that he had successfully

disarmed her, he stilled their movements. Her eyes opened, her expression filled with confusion.

"You're not finished, yet, are you?"

He answered her inquiry by grabbing her wrist and bringing her hand down to their union. Her eyes instantly widened while her cheeks flushed crimson. His objective was not to embarrass her but to let her feel just how desirable he found her.

He firmly guided her fingers over her softness and around his hardness that was now slick with her moisture. Then, he singled out her index finger and slowly slid it alongside his erection and into her warmth. Her heartbeat quickened against his chest, warning him that she was nearing her breaking point. His lips found her ear. Very softly he whispered, "Feel my love for you, Karen."

Michael held her finger in place while he once again started to move against her. Within minutes, they both hit their peaks. He shuddered hard against her as he emptied his seed into her. Her head fell forward onto his shoulder, and for a moment he was worried that she had passed out. "Still with me?" he quietly asked.

Without raising her head, his lover nodded.

He subtly separated himself from her and eased her feet back onto the floor, shifting her away from the wall. He felt her try to take a step backward, but he kept a tight hold on her. "Give yourself a minute, sweetness."

The endearment had instinctively slipped past his lips, taking him by surprise. It even made Karen glance up.

"_Sweetness?_" she questioned, her dark eyes sparkling with humor.

Michael's breath caught in his chest at the sight of her. He had never seen her look so happy or so damn beautiful. He had to go, before he decided to forgo their date all together and just spend the evening making love to her. "Can you stand?" he asked, his tone sterner than he had intended.

At her nod, he released her. She quickly shut off the water, which had long since lost its heat, while he zipped up his mechanic's uniform. When she turned back to face him, he saw that she had taken the liberty of picking up his mask. He hastily snatched it out of her hands.

"Sorry," she mumbled.

Michael wordlessly shook the water from the white lifeless face and its unruly strands of faux brown hair.

"So, are you going to tell me what happened?" Karen asked, obviously referring to his spontaneous visit.

He met her gaze and simply said, "I fell in love." He then shoved his face into the wet latex and strode out of the shower stall. A second later he vanished from the bathroom all together.

21. August 24, 1997: Part 4

"Wow, Karen, you look _hot_."

Dawn's compliment made the brunette blush. However, after being dragged to the full-length mirror, the latter couldn't help but to agree with her friend's assessment. The black cocktail dress clung to her curves in all the right places, and its capped sleeves and modest neckline made her feel more comfortable with its tight skirt, which ended about three inches above her knee. On her feet she wore black heeled sandals with dainty rhinestone straps that hooked around her calves just above her ankles.

Rebekah had tied the teenager's long brown locks up into a French twist and had embellished the up-do with several small gold diamond and ruby butterfly clips. A matching bracelet was clasped tightly around Karen's left wrist in place of her watch, and a single butterfly dangled from each of her ears. Rebekah had wanted Karen to wear the final piece of jewelry in the set—a large butterfly pendant strung on a delicate chain—but the brunette's gold cross hung from her slender neck instead. She hadn't taken off the necklace since the day her mother had given it her, and she wasn't about to break that tradition now.

Karen studied her face, amazed at Rebekah's handiwork. "You made me look so pretty," she praised, her gaze meeting the woman's.

"Karen, I only added a little color. The rest is all natural."

The brunette turned her attention back to the looking-glass, her chest constricting. Dawn placed a comforting hand on her shoulder and said, "I tried telling you..."

Karen shook her head, convincing herself that her friend was wrong and that the transformation which had taken place was only a trick of the eye brought on by a stunning ensemble and a little bit of make-up. Accepting the changes would mean accepting that she was as special as everyone seemed to think, and that just wasn't possible—not when it had taken her years to discover what her father had been doing to her. Michael _never_ would have allowed himself be drugged. She suddenly felt like such a failure. _Special indeed,_ she inwardly mocked. _What a joke._

"Karen, are you okay?" Dawn asked, removing her hand.

The brunette silently nodded. Then, she walked away from her traitorous reflection and into the bathroom. She left the door open as she took her birth control pill. She felt Dawn's gaze on her, but her only focus was getting through her date with Michael without making him suspicious that something was wrong.

Karen could not deny that she and the killer loved each other. The question was, could she truly be his soulmate without being special like him? She supposed only time would tell. For now, she would just enjoy her date with her lover. This night was theirs, and she was determined not to let anything spoil it, especially not her insecurities. Taking a deep cleansing breath, she strode out of the bathroom, passing Dawn with a smile.

"That's better," her friend said. "I was really beginning to worry."

"I'm fine, Dawn. I was just starting to feel overwhelmed by everything. That's all."

The blonde girl nodded. "So, are you ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be. Wish me luck."

Dawn gave her a big huge. "You won't need luck tonight, Karen. Just have fun. Heaven knows you deserve it."

"Thanks."

"Karen..." Rebekah sudden warned. Her blue eyes were fixed on the red digital numbers of the teenager's alarm clock.

"Yes, I know, Mrs. Helms," the brunette said. "I'm going." She then stepped away from her best friend and hurried out of the room.

22. August 24, 1997: Part 5

Michael entered the sunroom just as the Grandfather clock in the parlor started chiming the six o'clock hour. His eyes instinctively found the table. On its smooth wooden surface sat two place settings. Although each plate was covered, he trusted that steaks lay underneath the domed silver lids. Between the two plates stood a tall crystal vase filled with an assortment of flowers, presumably hand-picked from the garden as instructed. He didn't especially care for flowers, but he knew most females did. He just hoped Karen was one of them.

The click of heels nearing the room signaled his lover's approach. He directed his gaze to the door as it slowly opened. If he hadn't known for absolute certainty that the person joining him was Karen, he would have mistaken her for somebody else. He could only stare at her while she closed the door behind her. When she turned around to face him, he released a breath he didn't even realize he had been holding.

Karen stood in front of him and held his gaze. Her posture indicated she knew just how gorgeousâ€"sexyâ€"she looked. However, there was something buried deep within her expression that unsettled him. Whatever the problem was, she was hiding it very well. In fact, if he hadn't been so skilled at reading people, he would have missed it all together. He almost confronted her about it but quickly decided against it. Raising her defenses now would destroy the whole purpose of this romantic evening, which was to start breaking down the barriers she had built up around herself. Not only did he want to be her lover but her friend as well.

"Michael, please say something," she softly pleaded.

"Damn," he breathed.

Karen smiled, that special sparkle in her eyes the killer loved so much returning. She closed the distance between them and lightly kissed his cheek. "Thank you, Michael."

"You're welcome, sweetness," he gruffly replied, forcing his emotions to stay in check.

She took a step back, her lips turned upwards in a mischievous grin. "You sure dried off nicely."

Wanting to keep Karen in good humor, he said, "Well, it does help that it's almost ninety degrees outside."

She shook head in mock disgust. "Well, this doesn't bode well for us, does it?" she asked.

Michael blinked at her. "Excuse me?"

Karen's brown eyes danced. "Well, we're hardly five minutes into our date, and we're already discussing the weather."

"Yes, you could be right about that," he drolly agreed. "So what do you suggest?"

"Dinner," she quickly replied. "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

Michael looked at his lover, amused. "What about a cow?"

The smile dissipated from her face. "A cow?"

He chortled, knowing she was remembering seeing that dead dog he had killed just before her entry into the barn. "Steak," he clarified, still chuckling. "You really didn't think I would serve you raw cow, did you?"

Her blush told him that was exactly what she had been thinking.

"Come, Karen," he said, taking her hand. "I think your hunger is starting to meddle with your mind." He guided her to the table and pulled her chair out for her.

As she sat down, she said, "You are quite the gentleman, Michael."

He leaned forward and kissed the top of her head. As he lifted the lid off her plate, he snuck a peak down the front of her dress. "Not as much as I lead you to believe, sweetness," he replied with a smile, which she, of course, couldn't see. He then stepped away from her and sat down in his chair, the table conveniently hiding the effect that her body had on his.

Meanwhile, the teenager's dark eyes strayed to the crystal vase. "The flowers are very pretty, Michael."

"I'm glad you like them, Karen."

"Did you pick them?"

The killer quickly shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I delegated that task to someone else."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Do I even want to know?"

Smirking, he said, "Ask Dawn. I'm sure she'll tell you all about it."

A look of confusion passed over Karen's features, yet she silently turned her attention to her place setting. When she picked up her steak knife and started cutting her meat, Michael grunted low in his throat, now in total discomfort. She instantly looked up from her plate. Without a word, she set her silverware on it and then passed it to him. Using her utensils, he proceeded to slice through the steak. She carefully watched him, her gaze never leaving his hands. At that moment he wished he knew what she was thinking.

Once he had finished cutting her meat into bite-sized pieces, he offered the plate back to her, minus the knife. She took the plate from his hands, intentionally avoiding his fingers.

"Thanks," she simply said.

He wordlessly nodded, allowing the atmosphere between them time to settle. It wasn't until she raised her glass of water to her lips that he finally spoke. "Easy, Karen. Don't make yourself sick."

She took a few small sips of the clear liquid and then placed the glass back on the table. She quickly resumed eating, the light long gone from her dark eyes. Her guarded expression and tense posture was starting to set the killer on edge. Somehow he had to find a way to relax her in order to salvage what he had intended to be a romantic dinner date.

"Karen, tell me about yourself," he gently commanded, breaking the ice.

She set her fork down and gave him a long look. "What exactly do you want to know?"

"Anything," the killer simply replied.

Just when he thought his lover wasn't going to comply with his request, she said, "All right, Michael. My full name is Karen Marie Miller. I was born in Brookside, Illinois on October eighteen, nineteen seventy-nine to David and Holly Miller. I was just over a month old when my father moved us to Haddonfield."

"Interesting," he said. "Your mother didn't want to move?"

The teenager shook her head. "No. She was scared, Michael."

"Of me."

She nodded. "Yes."

The killer mimicked his companion's head gesture. "Her fear was not misplaced, Karen, though I would never harm a child."

Her eyes widened. "Never?" she asked.

"Never," he confirmed.

"Is that why you didn't attack me after the rape?"

"Initially, yes," Michael told her, "but by the time I had parted ways with you, it had become quite obvious that there was something special about you."

As soon as he had spoken those last words, the teenager's expression hardened. "That's what everyone believes," she grumbled.

"Everyone but you, apparently," the killer evenly noted. "You are my soulmate, Karen. That alone makes you unique from anyone else."

She sighed. "Michael, I know you love me, but do you ever feel that you were cheated?"

"_Cheated?_" he repeated, staring at the beautiful young woman sitting across from him. "Why the hell would I feel cheated?"

"Because you're the Boogeyman," she simply said.

His eyes narrowed. "You see yourself as my inferior."

"Michael, I am your inferior."

He firmly shook his head. "Karen, if that was the case, I never would have fallen for you. Now, please finish eating."

Without hesitation, she followed his instruction, seemingly relieved for the distraction. He wished there was something he could do to vanquish her self-doubt, but he knew there were just some issues she would have to work through on her own. At least she had accepted her role of his life partner, even though it was contradictory for her to believe that and her unworthiness at the same time. However, he was certain there would come a time when she would recognize her blunder and become the person Fate had chosen her to be. Until then, he would just have to be patient with her and continue to be the companion she so desperately needed.

"So, going back to your parents," Michael said, pressing forward with their conversation, "you said your mother feared me. What about your father?"

Karen pursed her lips together. "I don't think fear is necessarily the right word," she said at last. "He acted overly cautious on and around Halloween, but other than that he really didn't show any real sign of fear towards youâ€”not like my mom."

Michael nodded, not at all surprised by his lover's assessment of her father. After all, if the cop deemed the Boogeyman as a real threat, then he most likely would not have moved his family to Haddonfield in the first place.

"Of course," the teenager continued, "I didn't really understand their concern until after I started going to school."

The killer's brows instantly furrowed in bewilderment. "Are you saying your parents never told you about me?"

Karen gave her head a sound shake. "Nothing much past your name,

Michael. The most they ever told me was that you had committed some horrible crimes and to stay away from anyone wearing a white Halloween mask. I learned more about the gruesome details of your crimes through my classmates. That was hard, especially since you killed the previous sheriff's daughter."

Michael looked at his partner thoughtfully. "At that time were you scared that I would kill you?"

She sat quietly for a few moments and then repeated her negative head gesture. "Honestly, I was more frustrated with my parents than scared of you. It wasn't until after you and I met that my feelings about you got a lot more confusingâ€"and then trying to deal with my father at the same timeâ€"Michael, it was so draining."

He nodded. "So how did you cope? What was your release?"

"Schoolwork," Karen replied with hesitation. "It was the one thing in my life that was logical and that I could control. Nothing else made sense to meâ€"not my mother's departure, not my father, and certainly not you. "Besides," she added, "my father didn't let me have anything else until Dawn and her family moved to Haddonfield a year later, but the damage had already been done."

"Yes," Michael agreed. "I'm just glad you were able to survive that first year. I know that was no small feat given your situation." He paused and then said, "You did well, Karen." When she cast her eyes down to her empty plate, the killer rose to his feet and walked to her side. "Let's go for a walk, sweetness," he abruptly said, changing the subject. "I think you could do with some fresh air after being stuck inside for so long."

She gave him a timid look. "Could we go down to the beach?"

He nodded and held out his hand. She glanced down at it and then returned her eyes to his face. "The last time we did this, I passed out," she reminded him.

"You won't this time," he assured her.

She wordlessly nodded and hooked her fingers around his. He helped her from the chair and then entrapped her in his arms. He gazed upon her face for a long moment, completely captivated by her beauty. Then, he bent his head and kissed her. Just as he had hoped, his lover didn't realize they had left the sunroom until he lifted his mouth from hers.

"You sneak," she teased.

"Boogeyman," he countered, offering her a small smile.

Grinning, she bent down to unclasp her sandals.

"Allow me," he said.

She immediately shook her head. "No, Michael, I don't think that's good idea."

He ignored her objection and knelt down in front of her. She held

onto his shoulders as he lifted her right sandal out of the sand. He brushed the coarse grains from her toes, and that's when he heard itâ€”a slight snigger. He lightly traced the arch of her foot with his fingertips and was rewarded with another suppressed giggle. He raised his eyes, slowly shaking his head. "I should have warned you against showing me any of your weaknesses, sweetness. Now I have no choice but to exploit them."

Karen suddenly tried to wrench her foot free from his grasp. "Michael, you wouldn't dareâ€”"

He responded by giving her ankle a sharp tug, sending her straight down into the sand. He then quickly freed her foot from the sandal and proceeded to run his fingernails up and down its soft pad. His lover fell into a fit of laughter. Her body writhed in the sand as his hand continued its torturous onslaught.

"Michael, please!" she breathlessly begged. "Please, stop."

He relented, the redness in her face showing she had had enough. He moved away from her before the temptation to make love to her completely overpowered him. In the meantime, she sat up; unhooked her other sandal; and threw it at his head. He caught it before it hit its intended target and stared down at her.

"You, Mr. Myers, are an ass," she firmly declared. However, the humorous gleam in her dark eyes put him at ease.

"I've actually been called that once before," he told her while he bent to retrieve the sandal he had haphazardly tossed away.

"Really, only once?" she asked in jest, standing up.

He straightened and said. "Well, to my face at least. You and Dawn think a lot alike."

Karen's eyes widened. "Dawn called you an ass?"

"Yes."

"And she's still living? Michael, I'm impressed."

He began walking up the beach. His companion fell into step beside him. Predictably, she chose to tread in the lake's warm water.

"As you said, Karen, she didn't tell me anything I didn't already know, and she is very devoted to you."

"Yeah, I know," the teenager stated. "When I first told her about us, I was expecting her to fly off the handle. I mean, she was surprised, don't get me wrong, but she instantly accepted our relationship. Fortunately for me, because then she was able to keep you informed of what was going on."

"Yes," Michael agreed. "Her dedication to you makes her unafraid of me, which makes her a very good mediator."

"And yet you still came close to killing her."

He nodded, not at all surprised that his lover had noticed the small

scar he had left behind on her friend's neck. "She's not you, Karen," he sternly replied.

"Then, what stopped youâ€”simply your feelings for me, or was it something else?"

Michael paused in midstep and looked his soulmate. "Are you asking me if I like Dawn?"

She gave her head an affirmative shake. "Yes."

He continued his long strides. "I suppose I do," he admitted at last, "though at times she annoys the living hell out of me."

"Yeah, well, she feels the same about you, Michaelâ€”particularly when you show up in a room unannounced." Karen offered him a sideways glance. "I don't suppose there's anyway you could actâ€”I don't knowâ€”less boogeymanish around her?"

The killer raised his eyebrows at the teenager. "Less boogeymanish?"

She shrugged, almost apologetically. "I promised her I'd ask."

He sighed, wondering if Karen realized, yet, the amount of power she had over him. "All right, sweetness," he said. "I'll consider your request." The stunned look on her face confirmed that she still didn't know.

"Thanks," she quietly answered.

He merely nodded.

They walked in silence for a while until Michael finally asked, "Do you swim?"

"I haven't in a long time, but I know how," Karen stated. "Why, were you thinking about taking a dip?"

"I thought we could later and watch the sunset together."

The corners of her mouth instantly lifted. "I'd like that, Michael," she replied.

He nodded. "I figured you as much, the way you're splashing about."

Karen's smile waned. "It is bothering you?"

"No, not at all."

"Good, because even if it was, I wasn't going to stop."

"Just keep in mind I still have one more foot to tickle," the killer warned.

"True," the teenager agreed, "but I can't remember the last time I laughed that hard, and, I must admit, it felt really good."

"I love your laugh, sweetness," Michael confessed. He eyed her and

then added, "Not to mention seeing you squirm around in that dress made my evening."

Karen playfully punched his shoulder. "You were right, Michael. You are no gentleman."

"Hardly," he concurred. He then pointed to a few large rocks to their right. "Let's stop here for a while. You're sounding a bit winded."

She nodded. "All right."

The killer led the way through the sand. Once he reached their destination, he sat down. He leaned back against one of the rocks and stretched his legs out in front of him. Karen lowered herself down next to him, mimicking his posture. She didn't have much choice given the short length of her dress.

"Michael, what was your family like?" she asked him.

He tore his gaze away from her bare legs and shifted it to her face. "It was nothing extraordinary," he said. "My parents were both respectable. My father Donald managed a bank while my mother Edith stayed at home taking care of me. Everyone spoke very highly of Judith, including my parents, but she was nothing more than the town slut. Laurie, on the other hand, was very much a prude when I came back for her, living vicariously through her sexually active friends." Michael then stopped speaking and turned his eyes to the lake.

"That's it?" Karen questioned, sounding surprised.

The killer kept his stare fixed on the water. "I told you it was nothing extraordinary."

"All right, Michael. What about you?"

"That's a little more complicated, Karen. My full name is Michael Audrey Myers. I was born on October nineteen, nineteen fifty-seven. I killed Judith in nineteen sixty-three when I was six years old, was sent to Smith's Grove Sanitarium where I spent fifteen years of my existence, and then left there in nineteen seventy-eight to kill Laurie."

"But you didn't succeed."

"No, a misjudgment on my part, Karen. I'm not perfect."

"So what did you do for those fifteen years at Smith's Grove?"

"I waited. I knew I was different from everyone else, but it took years for my abilities to develop. I couldn't risk leaving Smith's Grove until I was ready."

"Years?" his lover asked.

Michael finally looked at her. "My transformation didn't happen overnight, sweetness. It took time."

Karen simply nodded, her gaze turning to the water. The killer let

her be, understanding he had given her a lot to think about. At long last she spoke. "Michael, during that time, would you have known if you were being drugged?"

"At the age of eight? I honestly don't know," he told her.

Her eyes immediately found his. "They never drugged you at Smith's Grove?"

He shook his head. "I never gave them a reason to. My own doctor didn't see the evil dwelling within me until my eighth year there."

"Samuel Loomis, right?" Karen inquired.

"Yes. He was my psychiatrist during my incarceration. He grew a very unhealthy obsession with me. He was the one responsible for Laurie's escape."

"Is he still alive?"

"No. He died a couple of years ago."

"I'm surprised you didn't kill him," Karen said.

"That would have been too obvious, sweetness, and it would have raised unnecessary alarms. I need Laurie to stay wherever she is until it's time for me to hunt her down."

His lover's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "You don't know where she is?"

He gave his head a soft shake. "Even I have limitations, Karen. All I know is that she isn't close and that she had a child."

Her eyes widened. "Seriously? Why would she go and do something stupid like that?"

"I don't know for sure," he said, "but I'm assuming she fell in love and got married. I can't imagine her having a child out of wedlock."

"Yeah, but are going to have to kill her child now, too?"

"Eventually," he evenly replied.

"So stupid," the teenager muttered, repeating her former sentiment.

Michael leaned over and brushed his lips over hers. "Try not to think about it, Karen," he kindly suggested. He then drew away from her and stood to his full height. "I think we should head back to the house now."

She nodded in agreement, seemingly aware that if they lingered among the rocks, they would both fall victim to their passion.

The killer watched as his companion carefully maneuvered into a standing position. "I love and hate that dress," he informed her

while she tugged its skirt down to a more modest length.

"Yeah, well, just remember who picked it out," she haughtily retorted.

"True," he said. "However, I am not the one who added it to your wardrobe, sweetness. You have Rebekah Helms to thank for that, although I highly doubt she had me in mind when she bought it for you."

The teenager gave him a sharp look. "She knows you're my lover, Michael."

"Yes, but knowing it and accepting it are two different things. You're a good person, Karen. That alone is going raise speculations that I'm somehow manipulating or seducing you to be in a relationship with me."

Her eyes flashed at him. "Like I would let someone do that to me again!" she angrily exclaimed.

"Let?" Michael quietly asked. "Karen, you didn't let your father seduce you. You were drugged. That's a huge difference."

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter, Michael. He still got what he wanted, and I was more than willing to give it to him."

"Only because you thought he was me," the killer sternly told her.

"Goddammit, Michael!" she yelled. "I wanted him to be you! I've loved you since the first time we met!"

He quickly closed the distance between them and pulled her into a tight embrace. "I know, sweetness. I've always known. That's why I didn't pursue you. I knew when you were ready Fate would guide you back to me."

Karen fisted the front of his coveralls and buried her face into his chest. "Michael, I love you so much."

He tenderly caressed the nape of her neck. "I know, Karen. I love you, too." When her grip on him finally slackened, he asked, "Did you still want to watch the sunset?"

She immediately nodded. "Yes."

"All right, then we have to go. We're running out of time."

Karen raised her head and stepped away from him. Taking her hand, Michael guided her down the shoreline back toward the mansion. Once they reached the Helms' private beach, he dropped her sandals in the sand and then jerked her hand, causing her to stumble in front of him. He released his hold on her so that he could unzip her dress.

"Michael!" she gasped. "What are you doing?"

"You'll drown trying to swim in this thing," he evenly stated while he stripped her down to her black bra and panties. He raised his

hands to her head and began removing the jeweled butterflies from her hair. However, he left the bobby pins behind, keeping her up-do intact. "I'd hate for you to lose any of these hair clips," he said. "They look expensive."

"Yeah, thanks," she replied.

He put them in his left breast pocket. Then, he took off his footwear and headed to the water.

"How is it that you can keep your clothes on and I can't?" Karen asked.

He looked at her and said, "Stop complaining, sweetness, or I'll strip you of everything" and I won't be nice about it either."

She studied him for a long moment before moving her hands behind her back.

"What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

"I know you're not bluffing, so I'm saving you the trouble of carrying out your promise," she said. "Is there anyone around?"

Without thinking he shook his head, his eyes fixated on his lover's slender body.

"Good." To his utter astonishment, she unhooked her bra and let it drop to her feet. "Shall I continue?"

Her boldness was making his blood run hot. "Karen..." he warned.

She tilted her head at him, mimicking one of his mannerisms. "Is that a yes or a no, Michael?"

"It's a damn yes," he gruffly answered. He watched closely as she gradually slid her panties down her legs. He groaned low in his throat.

She stepped out of the small piece of black material and joined him at the water's edge. Her eyes held such deep desire within their dark depths that they had turned almost black. "Now, Mr. Myers, I definitely think you're over dressed." She tugged his zipper pull down and shoved his uniform off his shoulders and down his arms, past his hips, thighs, and calves until the navy fabric was gathered around his ankles. She lifted one foot and then the other, completely freeing him of his coveralls. She slowly straightened, her eyes returning to his.

Michael could have easily thrown her down into the sand and made sweet love to her, but instead he wordlessly waded into the lake, hoping the water would be cool enough to slake his lust. Once the water reached waist high, he dropped to his knees, submerging everything but his head underneath the lake's surface. Karen leisurely swam up to him. She brushed a strand of hair away from his eyes and then leaned forward, capturing his lips in a tender kiss. Her body drifted closer to him while she continued to kiss him. "I want you, Michael," she murmured against his mouth.

"I'm all yours, sweetness," he quietly replied.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her hips into his. He grunted in pleasure as her heat enveloped his erection. "Karen, you feel so damn good."

"So do you." She remained stationary in his arms, apparently content just to be intimately joined with him. "Is this all right?" she asked, looking worried.

"It's more than all right," he assured her. "It's perfect."

Together they watched the wispy clouds above their head change colors as the sun slowly sank below the horizon. The sun's glow eventually faded from the sky altogether, leaving the two lovers cloaked in darkness. Michael suddenly realized that Karen was trembling against him and that her skin felt cold to the touch. He gently dislodged himself from her and said, "Time to head in, sweetness." He stood and then snatched her out of the water. He didn't receive any objections as he carried her to shore. He strode past their clothes only to stop in a small thicket of trees. One of the tree limbs had two beach towels draped over it. He set Karen down and hastily wrapped her up in one of the towels. She awarded him with a soft smile.

"You think of everything, don't you?"

He kissed her crown. "I try." He took the other towel and wiped the beads of lake water from his skin. Once he dried off, he tied the piece of fabric around his waist. "Stay here. I'll get our clothes."

Michael dressed and was in the midst of picking up the last of his lover's garments when he sensed someone nearby. Then, he heard something he never wanted to hear again: Karen's scream. He dropped her clothes, brandished his knife, and was at her side again in mere seconds. He found her standing over a man's body, her left hand clutched tightly to her towel. She was shaking from fear now instead of cold, and small droplets of blood speckled her pale skin. "Are you all right?" he instantly asked, ignoring the body on the ground.

"He just came out of nowhere," Karen breathlessly explained. "Scared the living hell out of me."

"Are you hurt?"

"Just my hand," she said, holding it up.

Michael gingerly examined it. "I don't feel any broken bones," he told her. "Can you move your fingers?" She wiggled all of them for him, though he could see she was in a lot of pain. He quickly searched her body for any other wounds. "Are you sure nothing else hurts?" He knew people suffering from shock were less likely to feel any injuries until the shock wore off.

Karen nodded. "Yes, I'm sure."

Satisfied by her answer, the killer turned his attention to the blonde-haired man, who was laying face-down in the sand. A steady stream of blood was oozing from an obvious broken nose.

"Is he dead?"

Michael shook his head. "No, sweetness, just unconsciousâ€"though you don't know how tempted I am to change that."

"We need him alive," Karen reminded him, her voice stern.

He looked at her. "I know."

"So now what?"

Michael ran a hand through his hair in pure agitation. "First, let's get you dressed. Then, we'll worry about him."

"And if he wakes up?"

"I'll knock him out again," the killer bluntly stated. "I would let you do it, but I don't think your hand can handle the abuse. At least now I know you can pack a mean punch."

"Yeah, but next time I would prefer to only hurt my intended target, not me."

"Once your hand heals, I'll teach you how to swing a proper punch, sweetness. In the meantime, are you feeling well enough to retrieve your clothes? I left them on the beach."

"Yeah, I think I can manage that. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Michael nodded. He kept a constant vigil on her, making sure no one else decided to ambush her. Once she returned to him, he helped her dress.

"Thanks," she said when he straightened from buckling her last sandal. She gestured to the man with her head. "So what are we going to do about him?"

"_You're_ going to ask him if he knows your father," the killer replied. "If he does, I want you to get as much information out of him as you can."

"And if he isn't associated with my father?"

Michael's expression hardened. "It won't change anything, Karen. He sealed his fate the moment he attacked you."

"Right," she quietly voiced. "Right."

The man finally started to stir. "Oh you fuckin' bitch," he wheezed as he protectively covered his nose with his hand.

The killer's fingers instinctively flexed around his knife's handle.

The teenager calmly laid a hand on his forearm. "Michael," she whispered, "if he thinks you're going to kill him, he won't tell us anything."

He met her gaze and slid his knife back into his pocket.

The man slowly sat up, his earth brown eyes taking in Michael's intimidating form. "Who the hell are you?"

"Funny," Karen humorlessly interceded, "we were just about to ask you the same thing."

"What's it to you, bitch?"

Michael glared down at the man, rage coursing through him. The only thing keeping him from attacking the man was his lover's gentle touch, yet even her fingers convulsed angrily on his sleeve.

"You might want to keep your name calling to a minimum before my friend, here, starts taking offense to it."

Too late, sweetness, Michael inwardly growled.

"You broke my nose," the man snarled.

"And you're trespassing on private property," Karen sternly countered. "Why?"

Then man sneered. "I got lost."

The killer grunted, his patience starting to wane.

"All right, let's try this again," the teenager said. "Who did you come to see? Me?"

The man shook his head. "I don't even know you. You're just a fine piece of ass."

Michael suddenly yanked his arm away from Karen and kicked the young man hard in the abdomen. The killer heard a few bones snap.

The man doubled over in pain. "Oh god!" he cried while coughing up blood at the same time.

Karen knelt down next to him, but there was no mercy in her gaze.

The man suddenly chuckled, spewing out even more blood. "Oh, I should have seen it before," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "You look just like him."

The teenager's demeanor immediately changed. Her body stiffened, and pure hatred filled her expression. "How do you know my father?"

The man's body was racked with even more coughs. That's when Michael knew he had delivered the man a mortal blow.

"All right, you really want to know?" the man asked. "Up until recently he bought drugs off me. He's a dirty cop."

Michael stared at his lover, who looked as though she was ready to kill the man herself. _Hold it together, Karen,_ he mentally told her. _You got this._

"Yes, I know he is," she darkly replied. "Did he send you

here?"

"Not specifically, no." The man coughed, again. "He told me to keep an eye on the blonde girl"and him." He haphazardly pointed to Michael.

Karen took a very deep breath. "How did you know they were here?"

"The girl came into the gas station I was working at"she matched the picture your father had given me."

DAMN! Michael's inner voice cursed. Dawn had mentioned this man to him, but they had both carelessly brushed the incident aside. At the time, his concern for Karen had made him lose sight of everything else.

"Did you tell him that you found them?"

The man's brown eyes slowly started to glaze over.

"Did you?" Karen repeated, her voice the harshest Michael had ever heard it.

The last word out of the man's mouth was barely audible, yet the killer heard it loud and clear. "No."

Karen choked back a sob. Michael instantly dropped to her side and gathered her in his arms. She wrapped her arms tightly around his neck and buried her face into the crook of his neck. "Come on, sweetness," he soothed. "Let's get out of here."

He rose to his feet and carried her back to the mansion. He knew she would not be able to handle his way of traveling between short distances, so he had no choice but to use the front door. He was hardly surprised to see Eleanor already waiting for him. She seemed to have innate sense of his movements"and of his character.

"Everyone has retired for the evening, except for Dawn," the woman said. "She's in the sitting room."

Michael shifted his lover on his arms and nodded at Eleanor. She wordlessly showed him to the room Karen's best friend occupied. He was about to enter it when Eleanor finally spoke.

"I've already brewed Karen some tea. Is there anything I can get for you, Michael"some whiskey or brandy, perhaps?"

He silently shook his head, but Karen said, "Ice, please, Eleanor. My hand may not be broken, but it starting to hurt like hell."

"Your hand, dear?"

Michael turned so the woman could see it.

"You're sure it's not broken?"

He nodded, answering for his companion.

Eleanor stepped back. "All right, Karen, I'll get you some ice, along with some pain killers."

"Thank you."

Once the woman's footsteps faded, the killer opened the door. Dawn glanced up, her light blue eyes widening at the sight of him unmasked. "Michael...?"

"Hello, Dawn," he curtly greeted.

Karen's head immediately shot up.

"I told you I'd consider your request, sweetness," he quietly reminded her. Then, he sat her down on a leather loveseat and prepared a cup of tea for her. She accepted it with her uninjured hand.

"Thank you, Michael."

The sincerity in her dark eyes told him she was thanking him for more than the tea. "You're welcome, Karen."

"So, is either of you going to tell me what happened?" Dawn impatiently asked.

"I was attacked," her friend answered.

"_Attacked?_" she gasped. "By whom?"

"By the gas attendant you dealt with just before we left Haddonfield," Michael told her.

Dawn's expression hardened. "Did he know me?"

Karen shook her head while she set her teacup down on the table. "Not directly. He was my father's drug supplier."

"What?! That's insane!" Dawn exclaimed.

"You said he made you uncomfortable," the killer interjected. "What _exactly_ did he say to you?"

The blonde girl's gaze met his. "Nothing that made me suspect he'd follow us here, Michael. Honestly. He was just overly flirtatious"and he had quite the mouth on him."

"Really?" his lover facetiously asked. "We hadn't noticed."

A horrified expression suddenly passed over Dawn's face. "Karen, does your father know we're here?"

She shook her head. "No."

"What of the man?"

"He's dead, Dawn," Michael emotionlessly replied.

She simply nodded.

A knock on the door broke the silence that had filled the room. Michael treaded to the door and opened it. Eleanor handed him a bag of ice, an Ace bandage, and a bottle of medicine.

"These may make her a little sleepy," she warned him, referring to the pills. "Now, are you sure there's nothing else you need?"

He shook his head.

"Very well. Good night, Michael." She peeked around the doorframe. "Good night, girls."

"Good night, Eleanor," they said in unison.

The woman then turned away only to face the killer once more. "I trust you will take care of the body?"

He gave his head a sharp nod and abruptly closed the door.

Karen's eyes quickly found his. "How does she know there's a body?"

"Some questions, sweetness, are best left unasked," he mildly replied. He sat down next to her so that he could better tend to her hand.

"You don't seem to like her very much," the other teenager noted.

"Dawn," he said without raising his head, "the only two people I like are sitting in this room with me. Everyone else I am forced to tolerate given the current circumstances."

"I knew you would come around, Michael," the blonde girl stated. "Does this mean I can talk to my boyfriend without you eavesdropping on our conversations?"

This time he looked at her. "Don't push it, Dawn."

"Fine," she conceded, "but you'll still let me talk to him?"

"Yes." Michael finished wrapping his lover's hand and gently laid the bag of ice over it. "How does that feel, sweetness?"

"Better," she said. "Thanks."

"Do you want to take your medicine now or later?"

"Now, please."

After opening the bottle, the killer shook two pills out into Karen's good palm.

"Are you leaving?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'll be back in a while."

"All right."

He ran the back of his knuckles down her pale cheek. "You did well

tonight, Karen. I'm very proud of you." He lightly kissed her lips and then rose from the loveseat. "Don't stay up too late."

Her dark eyes shone of her unspoken love for him. "I won't, Michael."

"That goes for you, too, Dawn," he sternly said as he placed the bottle of medicine on the coffee table next to Karen's teacup.

"We'll go to bed soon," the blonde teenager promised.

With a short nod, Michael left the room. He reappeared next to the drug dealer's dead body. Upon closer inspection, he found that Karen's fist had inflicted more damage than he first thought. She hadn't just broken the bridge of the man's nose, she had shattered it. She hadn't punched the man out of surprise but out of sheer anger.

The killer had seen glimpses of her anger on their date. It was boiling just beneath her calm demeanor, waiting to be released in some fashion. This man wouldn't have known that just by looking at her; she hid it too well. Karen may appear frail and meek on the outside, but, as the man had quickly discovered, she was actually a very strong and powerful young woman—and, yes, at times even heartless.

Michael's date with Karen may not have gone exactly according to plan; however, he now had a better understanding of her character and her attributes. Fate had been right to choose her for him. She was exactly the type of woman he needed—and he loved her for it. So. Damn. Much.

23. August 24, 1997: Part 6

Karen was bone-tired by the time she entered her bedroom. She pulled back her duvet and crawled into bed, not even bothering to change out of her clothes. She curled up into the fetal position, pulling the sheets up to her chin. Then, she closed her eyes.

The teenager was expecting to fall asleep quickly, but images of the drug dealer continued to plague her mind. After tossing and turning for nearly an hour, she finally admitted defeat and slid out of bed. She treaded to the bathroom, her footsteps falling silent on the wooden floor, despite the fact she was still wearing her heeled sandals. However, she gave it little thought as she entered the adjoining room to relieve a full bladder. While she sat on the toilet, she examined her injured hand.

By the time she had finished recapping her date to Dawn, the pain in her knuckles and fingers had receded. At first, the brunette thought it was due to the work of the pain killers, but from what she could see, the bruising was now gone, too. She slowly unwrapped the Ace bandage, her heart pounding in her ears. As the bandage fell away, her initial discovery was confirmed. Her hand was completely healed.

Dazed, Karen stood up and flushed the toilet. She carried the bandage to the vanity, setting it on the counter before giving her hands a

thorough washing. She actually considered taking a bath, especially since Michael was still out, but it was past three in the morning, and she didn't want to disturb anybody with the noise of the faucet. Instead, she moseyed back into her room and opened the French doors. She stepped onto the balcony and leaned against the stone railing. Her eyes stared down at the lake beneath her, hypnotized by the motion of the moon's reflection as it rippled over the water's dark surface. However, it hadn't drawn her in enough to make her oblivious to Michael's presence behind her.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he quietly asked, breaking the serene moment.

The teenager gave her head a brief shake, yet that did not deter her lover from walking to her side. Out of her peripheral vision she saw his gaze shift down to her right hand. She now wished she had kept it wrapped within the bandage, but she knew trying to hide it from him would be both foolish and futile on her part. As it was, he was probably waiting for something like this to happen to prove she was becoming more like him. She pursed her lips together. She might have been chosen to be his soulmate; however, that did not mean she had to follow in his footsteps. In fact, she was determined not to.

"Karenâ€" "

She turned to face him.

"This was bound to happen sooner or later," he told her. "You can try to fight it all you want, but in the end, it will only be an unnecessary waste of energy. Deep down you know that."

She released a heavy sigh and said, "I wanted to kill him, Michaelâ€"even before I knew who he was."

"Karen, had you punched him any harder, you would have succeeded."

She yearned to tell her lover she never meant to punch the man that hard, but the truth was she had, and, unsurprisingly, it had not gone unnoticed. "Yeah, I know," she softly replied.

Michael draped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her closer to him. "Your father suppressed your inner growth for a long time, sweetness, and it's going to take you a while to figure out what you're capable of and what your limits are."

"Michael, I do not want to become a killer," she sternly stated.

"Then, you're going to have to start releasing some of your anger, Karen, because right now you could easily kill someone without giving it a second thought."

"All right," she said, "so what do you suggest?"

"Well, I could take you hunting."

"Hunting?" she thoughtfully repeated.

Michael nodded.

"But that would mean me wielding a weapon, and we both know how that affects you."

"True," he agreed, "so I'll take you hunting, and then afterwards we'll engage in hot passionate sex."

Anyone else may have taken Michael's comment as a joke, but Karen knew he was dead serious. "I must admit your offer does intrigue me, Mr. Myers," she said, playing along with him. "However, before I can commit to such an arrangement, a demonstration will be in order."

His black eyes glinted at her. "Is that so?"

A familiar warmth settled between Karen's legs, yet she managed to maintain her composure. "Yes."

"Very well, Miss Miller, I think accommodations can be madeâ€" He paused for a moment and then said, "but not tonight."

Karen couldn't help but feel a tinge of disappointment. "May I ask why not?"

He grazed his lips against her temple. "Because, sweetness, I've been waiting all night to make love to you, and I want to savor every second of it, starting right now."

Karen's knees weakened as Michael planted affectionate kisses all over her face.

"So beautiful," he murmured.

She shivered when his mouth found her earlobe. He deliberately kissed and nibbled the soft tissue until she was fighting to keep herself grounded. She tangled her fingers in his hair, her whole body feeling as though it was on fire.

"Karen, just give me what I want," he mumbled.

She concaved as his hot breath and filled her eardrum. He hadn't even touched her, yet, and she was already shuddering against him. Simply amazing.

Michael kneaded her shoulder and back muscles as he moved his mouth to her neck. While his tongue made gentle circles on her skin, he hitched her dress up. He tenderly massaged her bottom with his palms, pushing her up against his arousal. She moaned, wishing he would slide his hands under her panties and start touching her. Instead, his fingers traced her panty-line, taunting her. Moisture built up between her legs, spilling onto the front of her panties. Finally, she couldn't take any more of his teasing. "Michael," she begged, "please touch me."

He leisurely shifted his hand, pressing his fingers firmly against the wet spot on her panties. She moaned into his shoulder as he slowly rubbed the damp material over her swollen nub. In turn, her hand instinctively found his hardness and started stroking it through his jumpsuit.

"Oh, sweetness," he groaned.

Michael's touching suddenly turned more persistent, forcing Karen into a quick climax. Then, he sat her down on the balcony's railing. He silently pushed her dress up to her waist and slid her panties down her legs. He stared at her bare womanhood, his black eyes smoldering with desire.

Instead of feeling embarrassed, Karen felt empowered. She boldly moved her fingers over her silkiness. The killer's breaths became more audible as she pleasured herself in front of him. Her eyelids fell closed as she worked her index finger into her inner folds.

A few moments later Michael knelt between her legs. She jumped slightly when he kissed her hand.

"Do you have any idea how sexy are?" he quietly asked.

Karen opened her eyes and looked down at her soulmate. Seeing his face so close to her womanhood instantly sent her into another orgasm.

"I love how your body responds to me," he continued, his voice low and very sensual. He flicked his tongue over her sensitive love button several times before drawing away from her. He then pulled her index finger out of her wetness and brought it to his mouth. Karen watched him suckle it, her heart racing. Oh how she ached for this man!

Michael eventually lowered her hand and raised himself up so that their faces were even. "Karen, tell me what you want."

"You," she firmly replied.

He unzipped his coveralls and pushed his erection inside of her. Karen bent her head and watched him make love to her. "Michael," she breathed. He also looked down. This was the most intimate moment they had shared together so far.

He slowly moved in and out of her, prolonging their lovemaking. Her breathing became ragged as an orgasm started to build deep within her body. His rhythmic thrusts gradually quickened and turned more forceful. She climaxed just as Michael's body turned rigid. She suddenly pushed him away, dropped to her knees, and twirled her tongue around the tip of his erection, both their bodies' flavors mingling together in her mouth. She wanted to taste more of him, so she began sucking his thickness, hard, occasionally grazing it with her teeth. He grunted and gripped her head tightly in his hands while he filled her mouth with his warm seed. She greedily swallowed it, loving the way it felt and tasted going down her throat.

Once she finished, Karen moved to stand only to have Michael push her down onto the balcony's stone floor. He stared into her eyes for a long moment before ravishing her mouth with his. Quickly overcome with passion, she returned his kiss with the same vigor. His manhood instantly hardened against her hip. She twisted her lower body towards his length, wordlessly telling him what she wanted. When he claimed her, his movements were not slow and loving like before. Instead, they were wild and lustful. This was exactly what she needed

from him tonight. He must have sensed it, too, because he roughly grabbed her calves and brought them up to her chest so that he could have easier access to her wet opening. He relentlessly pounded into her, shoving himself deeper with each powerful thrust. He forced her to endure multiple orgasms, one right after another, until he finally let himself go, putting an end to the sweet torture.

After pouring his seed into her, Michael ran the pads of his thumbs over Karen's flushed cheeks. "Let's go to bed," he gently suggested.

She nodded, feeling wonderfully spent.

He rose to his feet and zipped up his coveralls while she picked up her discarded panties. When she straightened, he moved forward and drew her into his arms. He lightly messaged her neck while she silently listened to his heart beat. He seemed to be contemplating something, but she did not dare to guess his thoughts.

At long last Michael released her and strode into her bedroom—their bedroom. Karen closed the French doors behind them. She then threw her panties into the hamper and walked over to her dresser. She pulled out a clean pair of panties, along with her summer pajamas. In the meantime, Michael disappeared into the bathroom in order to take care of his needs.

Karen dressed into her night clothes and then sat down on her side of the bed while she waited for her companion. A few moments later he emerged from the smaller room. He took a seat next to her and instantly reached for her hair. One by one he began removing the bobby pins from her long locks, tenderly massaging her scalp as he went along.

The teenager still had a few questions she wanted to ask Michael about the night's events, but she decided they could wait for another time and place. Instead, she scooted down; laid her head on his thigh; and closed her eyes.

She had almost fallen asleep when he pulled out the last hair pin. Without speaking, he gently moved her to her pillow. Karen heard him lay the small pile of bobby pins on her night stand. Then, he came to bed and stretched out next to her. She snuggled into his side, wrapping an arm securely around his waist. "Good night, Michael," she said.

He kissed her crown and replied, "Sleep well, sweetness."

With her lover now next to her, Karen succeeded in doing just that.

24. September 30, 1997

****FIVE WEEKS LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****September 30, 1997****

Dawn frowned into the receiver of her uncle's phone as Kyle and

Joel's phone rang for the fourth time. On the fifth ring, she admitted defeat; pressed the 'off' button on the handset; and set it back into its cradle, feeling very discouraged. Michael had taken Karen hunting, so this would have been the perfect time for her to talk with Kyle without having to worry about anyone eavesdropping on their conversation. Dawn decided she would wait an hour and then try calling again since she knew Karen and Michael would be gone until evening.

The blonde teenager knew the lovers did more than hunt on their frequent trips into the woods. Unbeknownst to them, she had once accidentally stumbled upon them while she had been out taking a walk. She clearly remembered seeing Karen lying on the ground underneath Michael with her legs hooked tightly around his waist and catching glimpses of his long thick member as it moved in and out of his lover's shaved wet opening. Dawn hadn't meant to stay and watch, but the sight of them making love had been a real turn-on for her. Even now, the memory of it made the area between her legs throb with lustful need.

Without thinking, she sat down in her uncle's computer chair and pushed a finger against the crotch of her shorts. She could already feel a spot of moisture forming on the front of her panties. Spreading her legs farther open and closing her eyes, she slid a hand underneath her clothes and began rubbing feverishly at her swollen nub, wanting to come hard and fast.

Suddenly, Dawn heard the study's door creak on its hinges. Mortified, she quickly pulled her hand out, but it was already too late. The intruder had already stepped through the threshold and was now starting at her, a smirk plastered on his attractive face.

"I didn't mean to interrupt," he said, his emerald-green eyes aglow with both humor and lust. "Mr. Helms asked me to find some paper work. I just assumed his office would be empty."

"Uh, yeah, I was just, uh, making a phone call to my, uh, boyfriend," Dawn stuttered, never feeling so embarrassed in her life.

The raven-haired man glanced down at her finger, which was still glistening with her juices. "Must have been some phone call," he commented in jest.

"Uh, yeah, I mean, no. He wasn't home," Dawn replied, utterly flustered. Not knowing what else to do, she quickly rose from the chair. "I'm sorry, but I have to go. I hope you find what you're looking for."

The man's gaze hardened, but not in an unfriendly way. "I think I just have," he said, now serious. "If you want, I would be willing to help relieve some of yourâ€"frustrations."

The teenager's heart stopped for a moment. She didn't even know this man, yet she found herself actually considering his offer. While she stood there, he slowly closed the door behind him and locked it. She looked at him and started to slightly panic, "Wait, I didn't give you an answer," she said.

He closed the gap between them and gently pushed her back down into the chair. "Yes, you did," he huskily stated. "Don't worry; I'm not

going to hurt you. I just want to help a little, that's all."

Dawn began to tremble, not from fear but from need. Her body wanted this so badly, though in her mind she knew this was wrong on so many levels. Not only was this man a complete stranger, but she had a great boyfriend, who she one-day planned to marry. If she went through with this, she could very easily mess everything up. Then again, everything was already messed up, thanks to Karen's father.

As the man grazed his fingers over the button of her shorts, Dawn's breath caught a little. He paused in his movements and studied her. "Are you going to be all right with this?" "honestly?" "because if you're not, I'm going to stop right now."

She firmly shook her head, her body's needs overpowering her senses. "No, it's okay," she said, "really. I'm just a little nervous."

He kindly smiled at her. "Don't be. Like I said, I'm not going to hurt you."

Dawn sat very still while the man deftly unbuttoned her shorts and unzipped her fly. He then pushed the denim past her hips. She felt her face redden when his gaze dropped to the damp spot on the front of her pink floral panties. Reaching out a finger, he gently prodded the area with his fingertip. Her stomach muscles quickly tightened in response to the different sensations he was creating within her.

"I take it you like this?" he softly asked.

"Yes," she breathed. "Very."

"Do you want more?"

Without hesitation, Dawn nodded. "Please."

The stranger slipped his finger underneath the leg of her panties and wiggled it against her very sensitive nub. "How's this?"

"So good," she muttered.

"Do you want me to make you come?"

She offered the man another nod. She gasped when he started rolling her nub between his fingers. "Oh, yes," she moaned, moving her hips to his rhythm. Minutes later, her body began to shake as she experienced a strong orgasm.

He gave Dawn a lazy smile as he slid his digit towards her wet maidenhood. Despite the fact that she and Kyle had been dating for years, he never once touched her down there, and even when she masturbated, she kept her fingers strictly on her nub, making sure to keep her virginity intact. "No, please, don't touch me there," she begged. Much to her relief, the man instantly stopped.

"Are you still a virgin?" he gently asked.

She bit down on her lip and nodded.

"Okay, I have an idea." The man knelt between Dawn's legs and tugged

her panties and jeans down past her knees. Then, he moved forward, bent his head, and licked her maidenhood.

The teenager nearly jumped out of her skin at the contact. She instinctively grabbed onto his shoulders and held on tight as his tongue entered her. Not wasting any time with foreplay, he unceremoniously flicked his tongue in and out her wetness. Since she had never experienced oral pleasure before, she didn't last long, coming extremely hard.

The man lifted his head, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "There," he said. "Feel better now?"

Dawn numbly nodded.

He grinned. "Good. I'm glad I could help."

As he stood up, she instantly noticed the bulge protruding from the front of his pants.

"Is there anything I can do to, uh, help you," she timidly asked.

He shook his head. "Honestly, honey, the only thing that can help me right now is a good fuck, and I know it won't come from you."

Dawn frowned. "I'm sorry."

The man waved her off. "Don't worry about it. It will go away in a few minutes." He eyed her and then added, "Though it would help if you got dressed."

She blushed and quickly pulled up her shorts and panties.

He nodded in approval.

Dawn watched as he began shuffling through a stack of papers on her uncle's desk. Although he hadn't dismissed her, she still felt inclined to leave the room. "Well, thanks, again," she awkwardly said. "I guess I'll see you around."

The man suddenly glanced up. "Wait a second, honey. I don't even know your name."

"It's Dawn," she told him.

"Dawn," the man softly repeated. "I like that." More loudly he said, "I'm Markus, but my friends just call me Mark."

She lifted her eyebrows at him. "So what should I call you?"

He chuckled. "Mark is fine, Dawn."

"All right," she replied. "Then I will see you around, Mark." She started walking to the door.

"Hopefully sooner rather than later," he voiced, his tone low and husky.

Dawn's hand trembled on the lock as she unlatched the door. She

wanted to think this would be the first and last time they would meet. Without saying another word, she left the study, closing the door tightly behind her. Then, she scurried up to her bedroom where she was determined to spend the rest of the day.

* * *

><p>"I still don't understand how you can eat raw meat like that."<p>

Michael eyed his lover as he pulled another piece of flesh from the rabbit's rib cage. "It's really not that bad, sweetness." He offered her the small piece. "Here, try it."

She instantly shook her head. "If I eat that, Michael, I'll get sick."

"Before, yes," he replied, "but not now."

She simply stared at the rabbit's flesh in his hand.

"Come on, Karen," he gently coaxed. "You know I wouldn't tell you to do anything that could potentially harm you."

Sighing, she took the meat from his fingers and started nibbling at it. "You're right," she admitted, "it's not too bad."

Michael simply nodded.

"I know you prefer dog, though," she stated. "Why?"

He watched as Karen went for another piece of meat and inwardly smiled. After a moment he said, "I don't know for sure, sweetness, but since dogs are man's best friend, and I am no friend of man, I suppose it just makes sense that I prefer the taste of dog over any other animal."

"Hmm, never thought of it that way," she said as she chewed on a bite of food.

Michael suddenly reached out and brushed a few strands of hair away from his lover's face. "Do you have any idea of how attractive I find you?" he softly asked. She looked at him, and he couldn't stop himself from kissing her. Her mouth instantly opened under his. He gladly accepted the invitation, exploring her mouth with his tongue.

As they kissed, Michael gently guided Karen to the ground. He slid his hands up her shirt, shoving up her bra so that he could knead her breasts. She moaned and slightly arched her back. He loved the way her body moved underneath his. It was so damn sexy. Wanting more and knowing damn well how to get it, he lifted his mouth from hers and trailed affectionate kisses over to her ear.

"No, Michael," she pleaded. "You know what that does to me."

"I know," he muttered, thrusting the tip of his tongue inside her ear. Her breathing deepened and her muscles tensed, especially when he started rubbing his lower region against hers. "Karen, come for me," he softly demanded, though he knew she hardly needed the

encouragement. Still, he roughly tweaked both her nipples, just to be safe.

"Dammit, Michael!" she moaned as she let herself go.

Once Karen had recovered from her orgasm, Michael sat up. He freed her feet from tennis shoes and slid his hands up her legs until they reached the waistband of her jeans. After unfastening them, he tugged them and her panties down her legs, setting both garments off to the side. Then, he leaned over her and very lightly grazed his fingertips against her moist lower lips. Her breath hitched as they touched her swollen nub. He proceeded to gently play with it. Her hips instantly began moving with the motion of his fingers, and it wasn't long before he brought her to another orgasm.

By this time, Michael could no longer ignore the painful ache between his legs. He quickly unzipped his coveralls, releasing his stiff manhood. He spread Karen's thighs apart and lowered himself down into her slick folds. She moaned and writhed beneath him while he slid in and out of her wet core. He wrapped his arms around her, yearning to be even closer to her. When her body started to shake against his, he pushed into her hard, grunting in pleasure as he reached his own climax. Afterwards, he continued to hold her, giving them both time to drift down from their high.

Eventually, Karen ran her hands over his bare chest and said, "I'm ready to go back now."

Michael nodded and rose to his feet. After they dressed, he promptly grabbed her hand and closed his eyes. Seconds later, they were standing in the center of their bedroom.

"Why here?" Karen asked.

The killer couldn't blame her for being curious. Often times now he would find another vacant room in the mansion for them to hang out in, just to give her a change of scenery. "The Helms have company," he told her.

"Ah," she said. "Well, that's okay. Maybe I'll rest for a bit if you don't mind."

He shook his head. "No, not at all. In fact, I think I'll join you."

Karen grinned, slipping off her shoes. Then, she walked over to the bed and laid down on the mattress. After kicking off his boots, Michael mimicked her actions. She nestled into him. He tenderly combed his fingers through her hair, lulling her into a deep slumber.

The killer stayed awake and simply watched his soulmate sleep. The amount of love he harbored for her still amazed him, and each day it intensified, strengthening their bond. The changes taking place within her were becoming much more evident now. Between her stealthy hunting skills and her newly developed taste for raw meat, he knew she was beginning to transform into his true equal, and that made him love her even more.

As Michael lay quietly on the bed, his ears picked up a sound other

than Karen's soft breathing. He listened for a moment longer. He quickly distinguished the sound as mournful crying, and it was coming from the bedroom directly next to theirs. With a sigh of resignation, he carefully eased himself away from his lover and left the bed. Once he had pulled his boots back onto his feet, he silently walked out of the room.

The killer stood in front of Dawn's bedroom door and softly rapped on it. When he didn't receive an answer, he took the liberty and allowed himself into her room. He found the blonde teenager laying face-down on her bed, sobbing uncontrollably into her pillow. Instead of going directly to her, he detoured into her bathroom where he grabbed a glass of water and a box of tissues. Then, he strode back into the bedroom. He set the items down on her nightstand before crouching down next to Karen's best friend. "Dawn?" he softly asked.

Without raising her head, she cried, "I-I don't want to s-stay here any m-more."

Michael frowned. "Why? Did something happen?"

Dawn's sobs became louder as she nodded. "I-I'm such a h-horrible person."

Without thinking, he laid a hand on her back in a comforting gesture. "I hardly believe that's true," he said.

"Y-yes it is," she insisted, still crying hard. "I-I've ruined e-everything. I-I don't e-even know what I d-did it. Kyle w-will never f-forgive me."

Michael's eyes widened. "You're boyfriend?"

"Y-yes."

He suddenly became very concerned for the teenager. "Dawn, what _exactly_ did you do?"

She turned her head just slightly, looking absolutely grief-stricken.

Michael's jaw clenched angrily. "Dawn, did someone hurt you?"

She instantly shook her head but tears once again started falling from her eyes. "N-no, he did h-hurt me. I-I wanted him toâ€"toâ€" Her voice broke off as more sobs racked her body. "I d-didn't even k-know him."

As the killer began putting the pieces together, he understood what had happened. "Did you sleep with him?" he quietly asked.

"No, n-nothing like t-that," she said, "but I s-still shouldn't have l-let him touch me. I love K-Kyle."

Michael remained silent, not really sure what to say.

"I'm just s-so lonely."

He drew out a deep breath. "I know."

Dawn sat up and reached for the tissues. After she cleaned her face, she grabbed the cup Michael had left for her and took a few long sips of water, which helped calm her down. "I still can't believe I let a complete stranger feel me up," she muttered, returning the cup to the night table.

"Well, to be fair, Dawn, Karen and I were basically strangers when we slept together the first time," Michael said. "At that point, we both just needed the physical release" especially Karen. Her need was definitely stronger than my own."

"But she didn't have another boyfriend," Dawn argued. "You are the only man she's ever wanted, Michael. Just like Kyle should be the only man I want. My feelings for him should have been strong enough to make me say no to Mark."

"So why didn't you?" the killer asked.

She shrugged. "I don't know. I was just feeling frustrated and lonesome, and he was just" there" offering me something we both knew I wanted at the time."

Michael gave her a hard look. "You still want it, Dawn."

She opened her mouth to object but then closed it. Finally she shyly said, "Kyle and I have never fooled around like that. Maybe that's another reason I didn't say no. Sometimes I feel" I don't know" neglected by him" that although he loves me, he doesn't find me desirable."

"Have you talked to Kyle about any of this?" Michael asked.

"I've tried," Dawn answered. "He claimed it was my age. He didn't want to stir up any trouble, especially since my father's a cop."

The killer nodded. "I hate to say this, Dawn, but the boy did make a good point."

"Yes, but _nothing, _Michael?" she asked. "I'm not saying I need sex, but give me something" _anything_." She took another sip of water. "I'm sorry, Michael, I really shouldn't be bothering you with this."

He shook his head. "You're not bothering me, Dawn," he evenly stated.

The teenager sighed. "I really need to tell Kyle what happened."

"So call him."

"I don't know... It's getting kind of late"|"

Michael calmly looked at her. "Dawn, you and I both know you're never going to sleep tonight if you don't at least try."

She set her empty cup aside and said, "All right, Michael, I'll call him."

The killer's expression turned stern. "Just do me one favor, Dawn."

After you tell him, don't take everything he says to you to heart. He's most likely going to be angry and might say some things he really doesn't mean."

She nodded and stood up. "Thanks, Michaelâ€"for everything."

He also rose to his feet. "You're welcome."

He followed Dawn out of her bedroom and quietly slipped back into his and Karen's quarters while the blonde girl continued down the corridor.

* * *

><p>Dawn entered her uncle's study, completely ignoring his computer chair, as though blaming it for her current predicament. She reached for the phone and with trembling fingers dialed Kyle's number. To her astonishment, someone answered the line right after the first ring.<p>

"Hello?"

"Oh, hi, Kyle," she nervously replied. "I actually wasn't expecting you to be home."

"I just got back from my evening class. Why? What's wrong?"

Dawn paused for a long moment and then said, "Kyle, there's something I need to tell you. I let another man touch me today."

"I don't understand," he said, confused. "What do you mean by touch?"

She started to shake a little harder. "I let him finger me, Kyle."

"Where, Dawn?" he harshly asked. "Your pussy?"

She started to choke up again. "No," she answered, "just my clit. I didn't mean for it to happen. I'm so sorry." She couldn't bring herself to tell her boyfriend that she had also received oral sex and that her maidenhood wasn't completely virgin any more.

"Why, Dawn? What made you do it?"

She felt her cheeks redden. "He caught me masturbating and asked if he could help." She paused and then said, "He didn't do anything I didn't want him to do, Kyle."

"Dawn, how could you do this to me?" he angrily asked. "I thought you loved me."

"I do," she insisted.

"Really? If you love me so much, then why the hell did you cheat on me?"

"I just wanted it," Dawn honestly told him. "I have no other reason."

"Did you even know this guy?"

"No," she quietly replied.

"Well, if you ever see him again, you might as well let him fuck you, because we are through," Kyle harshly stated.

Tears started streaming down Dawn's face. "Kyle, n-no! You d-don't mean that! I k-know you're u-upset, but we can w-work this out. I p-promise it won't h-happen again," she sobbed.

"Oh?" he skeptically asked. "And how do I know that?"

"Y-you just have to t-trust me," she replied in earnest.

"That's the problem, Dawn. I can't trust you. You've just proven that."

"K-Kyleâ€"

"Dawn, it's late," he sharply interrupted. "I have to go. Good-bye."

"W-wait, Kyle, p-pleaseâ€" she desperately pleaded. "I l-love you."

He scoffed. Then, the line went dead.

Dawn numbly set the handset down on her uncle's desk and sauntered out of the study. Instead of going back to her room, she wandered into the parlor. She poured herself a large glass of wine and hunkered down on a sofa. The alcohol helped calm her, but it didn't help her forget about what she had doneâ€"or about Mark. Michael was right. Despite everything, she still desired the raven-haired man with the emerald-green eyes. She couldn't help wondering if their paths would ever cross again and what would happen if they did.

And then there was Kyle, who was her first crushâ€"her first love. Yes, she still loved him, but she wanted the passionate love that Karen and Michael shared. Mark had kindled that flame deep within her belly, and she yearned to experience it again. However, she also wanted to fix her relationship with Kyleâ€"didn't she?

Gulping down the rest of her wine, Dawn decided she was getting much too sleepy to sort out her problems tonight. Eventually, the wine glass slipped from her fingers as she passed out, her head falling limply onto the arm of the sofa.

25. October 1, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****October 1, 1997****

A walk outsideâ€"that's exactly what Dawn needed in order to clear her head. She rose from the kitchen table, briefly glancing down at her half-eaten breakfast. She hated to waste food but between her

distraught emotional state and the effects of the wine she had drunk the night before, she just wasn't that hungry. Besides, she wanted to leave the mansion before either Karen or Michael came downstairs looking for her.

She swiftly exited the kitchen and hurried to the front door. She drew in a sharp breath as the crisp morning air hit her face. She was still wearing her shorts and t-shirt from the previous day, not having bothered to change out of them. Sighing, she glanced at the black iron coat rack that stood near the door. She grabbed her blue fall jacket from the tall stand. She slipped her arms into the garment and zipped it up. At least her upper body would now stay warm.

Dawn stepped into the early sunlight, closing the door quietly behind her. She ran down the front steps, slowing her pace when she reached the courtyard. She strolled its perimeter, purposely staying within the fence-line. While she walked, her thoughts inevitably strayed to the events of the day before. She tried hard not to think about them; however, they refused to be ignored. Frustrated, she sat down on a lawn bench and stared down at the frost-covered grass at her feet, wishing she could simply erase what she had done.

Suddenly, a pair of black tennis shoes obscured her view. Dawn raised her eyes, though she already knew who was standing before her.

"Hey," Karen quietly greeted, her expression etched with worry. "Michael told me I would find you out here."

Feeling betrayed, Dawn harshly asked, "Oh really? What else did he tell you?"

Her friend's brow furrowed in confusion. "Absolutely nothing. He just thought you could use some company, but if his assumption was wrong, I'll let you be."

The blonde teenager quickly shook her head. "No, I'm sorry. Please sit. I should have known he would not have broken my confidence."

"Broken your confidence about what?" Karen inquired, sitting down.

Dawn sighed. "About me cheating on Kyle yesterday while you two were out hunting."

"I don't understand," the brunette admitted. "I didn't realize you've been seeing someone else on the side."

"I haven't been," Dawn said, now growing very uncomfortable. "I, uh, don't know him at all. He just happened to enter my uncle's study while I was, uh, pleasuring myself, and things just kind of, um, escalated from there. I'm still a virgin, though, in case you were wondering."

Karen's gaze hardened. "So, just how far did you go with this stranger?"

Dawn's cheeks turned warm. "He gave me oral," she said, "but no one

else knows about that part. I only told Michael and Kyle that I let him touch me, which I did, but then he wanted to give me more."

"Dawn, did you want more?" the brunette softly asked. "Or were you too far gone at that point to even care?"

The blonde girl's eyes narrowed. "He didn't seduce me, Karen, if that's what you're implying. I could have said no at any time, and he would have stopped."

"Dawn, he knew you were too worked up to turn him down. Had you two met under different circumstances, I sincerely doubt you would have let him touch you like that. It sounds like he totally took advantage of the situation"and of you."

"You can think that all you want," Dawn haughtily replied, "but, if that was the case, then he would have fucked me while he was at it, and he didn't."

"No, because that would have been considered rape," Karen said. "He'll make sure you're begging for it before he tries anything like that. Men like him know exactly how to get what they want without resorting to rape. Trust me."

Dawn's suddenly became very angry with her friend. "How dare you!" she seethed. "You don't even know him."

"And you do?" the brunette countered, standing up. "Look, I just don't want you getting hurt, all right?"

Dawn silently nodded and then watched as Karen headed back to the mansion. The platinum-haired teenager couldn't help but mull over her friend's words. Yes, Dawn had taken offense to them at first, yet upon further reflection, they did make a lot of sense. After all, Mark had caught her in a very vulnerable position when it was obvious that her body was in dire need of some sexual release. Still, just thinking about their impromptu encounter made her damp with lust.

Dawn restlessly left her seat on the bench and continued her stroll. She never imagined she would risk her loving relationship with Kyle for a few minutes of lustful pleasuring from a complete stranger. She couldn't blame her boyfriend for being furious with her. Then again, maybe he had been having his own fling on the side with Tracy. Dawn would never know for sure whether his relationship with Tracy was strictly professional, or if Tracy was, in fact, his girlfriend"possibly even lover. Kyle had insisted they were just coworkers, at the very most friends, but the blond teenager was certain that if he harbored any feeling towards Tracy, he would now be tempted to act on them.

However, if Kyle loved Dawn as much as he claimed, then maybe she just had to give him some time to cool down. After all, she had been honest with him, and surely that had to count for something. Yes, perhaps all would not be lost after all. Even Michael had warned her that Kyle would probably say some things to her out of spite that should not be taken too seriously. Surely, telling her that their relationship was over was one of those things. They had been dating too long for him not to forgive her. Besides, everyone makes

mistakes.

Dawn rounded a bend just as a black Cadillac pulled up to the gate, not far from where she was walking. Her jaw literally dropped when a raven-haired man dressed in a gray business suit fluidly stepped out from the vehicle. He turned. She froze, barely breathing. Time seemed to stop as their eyes met. Then, he instantly started striding toward her. For a moment she considered running, but her feet refused to move.

"Well, good morning," the man cordially greeted. "Fancy meeting you again."

"Good morning, Mark," Dawn curtly replied.

His grin dissolved as he studied her features. "No offense, honey, but you look like shit. What happened?"

"My boyfriend broke up with me last night because of what I let you do to me. That's what happened," Dawn bitterly told him. "Now, if you excuse me, I'm going to head back inside."

"Wait," Mark commanded. "You told him?"

Dawn nodded. "I had to."

He gave her an appraising look. "I admire your courage."

She merely shrugged. "Well, I figured it would be best to own up to my mistake."

Mark's emerald eyes narrowed. "Do you really consider what we did a mistake?" he gruffly asked.

"Yes!" Dawn sharply exclaimed. "I had everything I ever wanted in my boyfriend. He's a great guy."

Mark roughly grabbed her shoulders and said, "He may be a great guy, Dawn, but he obviously isn't everything you want, because if he was, you never would have let me touch you."

"You got some nerve!" she fumed. "I love him!"

Mark's expression softened, yet he did not release his hold on the teenager. "Loving someone and being in love with someone are two different things, honey."

Dawn tried hard to ignore the feelings the man's touch was once again creating deep within her. She looked at him crossly. "We were going to get married."

"In that case, I'm glad I found you when I did."

Before Dawn could react, Mark bent his head and kissed her. Sparks of desire instantly shot through her body, and suddenly she wanted more than just a passionate kiss. "Mark," she breathed.

"More?" he murmured.

At her nod, he broke their kiss and guided her to a more secluded

area of the yard. She started to tremble as he unzipped her jacket and slipped his hands under her shirt. She moaned quietly while he groped her breasts, tweaking her taught nipples. After a few minutes, he moved a hand to the crotch of her shorts and pressed his palm against her. The dampness she had felt earlier returned with a vengeance.

"I can feel you getting wet," Mark softly commented. "Would you like me to play with your clit again?"

Dawn instantly nodded. "Yes."

Mark quickly pulled her shorts and panties down and glided his forefinger over her moist lower lips. Her eyes widened when he suddenly unzipped the front of his pants with his other hand and pulled out his hard manhood. He rapidly moved his hand up and down its long shaft while he vigorously rubbed her tender nub.

When her legs began to shake from an intense orgasm, she instinctively leaned into him for support. He took that opportunity to push his erection against her wet slit. She moaned and opened her legs a little wider, too lost in the moment to really know what she was doing until she felt the head of his manhood slide into her virgin opening. He gently kneaded her bare backside with his hands, encouraging her to continue. Instead, she stood there completely motionless, shocked by what she had been about to do. She wanted her first time to be special and meaningful, not the result of a lustful tryst with a man she knew only by name. Tears flooded her vision as she stepped away from him. "I'm sorry, Mark. I can't do this."

He raised a hand to her face and gently caressed her cheek. "Honey, please calm down. You're not doing anything bad. It's only natural to want more."

Dawn quickly pulled up her clothes. "You're right, Mark. I do want moreâ€”much more."

With that she briskly turned on her heels, determined never to let him touch her again.

She entered the mansion only to be immediately greeted by her uncle. His lips were pressed into a thin line.

"What were you doing with Mr. VanTroy?" he sternly asked.

The teenager kept her expression neutral. "We were just talking."

Her uncle shook his head in obvious displeasure. "Dawn, must I remind you that you are in hiding and that you could be endangering your life by introducing yourself to strangers?"

She hung her head in shame. How could she have been so reckless? "I'm sorry, Uncle," she said, her tone now fearful. "I promise it won't happen again."

He raised her chin with his forefinger. "Dawn, Markus VanTroy is a reputable man within the firm, so you should be safe. However, I still want you to be careful around him. Understand?"

Dawn nodded. "Yes, Uncle."

"Good." His attention was suddenly diverted to one of the large front windows. "Speaking of which, here comes the man now."

The teenager wanted nothing more than to dash up to her bedroom, but she had to stay appease her uncle.

He hospitably opened the door and smiled. "Good morning, Mr. VanTroy," he said, extending his hand. "Please come in."

Mark gave her uncle's hand a firm shake. "Thank you, Mr. Helms. I brought the files you requested."

"Excellent."

Mark's green eyes inevitably landed on Dawn. She held his gaze as her uncle glanced over the various folders the raven-haired man had handed him. Stealing the opportunity, Mark's emerald orbs traveled south until they settled on her crotch. Mine, he possessively mouthed.

Frowning, the teenager subtly shook her head, mentally cursing his arrogance. Just because she had faltered once did not mean it would happen again. She was through playing his games. Karen was right. Men like him were nothing but trouble.

Her uncle eventually glanced up from the paperwork and said, "Well, we may as well go into my study, Markus, and give these files a more thorough read."

"Yes, of course," the raven-haired man replied. "Good day, Dawn."

"Good-bye, Mr. VanTroy."

Instead of looking disgruntled by her curt farewell as Dawn had hoped, Mark awarded her with a smug wink before following her uncle down the corridor. She immaturely stuck her tongue out at him behind his back in retaliation. Then, she headed directly upstairs to her bedroom, gladly leaving the men to their work.

* * *

><p>Mark sat down in a straight-backed desk chair, inwardly snickering as Nathaniel Helms took a seat in the same chair Dawn had orgasmed inâ€"twice. Just the memory made Mark's pants tighten uncomfortably.<p>

Nathaniel's eyes bore into Mark's from across the desk, as though the older man knew what the younger desired. "I don't know what Dawn has told you about her current circumstances," said Nathaniel, "but the reason she is staying here is because her life is in danger."

Mark's expression hardened. "Is this some kind of sick joke to make me stay away from her?" he asked.

"Hardly," Nathaniel replied, his tone grim. "We got another visitor staying with us whose primary objective is to protect both Dawn and his girlfriend, and, trust me, he will do everything in his power

to ensure their safety."

Mark couldn't help but scoff. "Who is heâ€"some deranged serial killer?"

Nathaniel remained stern. "I am not going to disclose all the details to you, Markus, but Dawn's whereabouts must be kept secret. If you decide not to adhere to this, I am not going to be responsible for anything that may happen to you. Do I make myself clear?"

Mark drew out a long breath. "So, what you're basically telling me is that Dawn is off limits."

Nathaniel shook his head. "Not necessarily, though I am also going to warn you that she is a minor and that her father is a cop."

"Wait," Mark demanded, "If her father's a cop, then why isn't he doing more to protect her?"

"Believe me, having Dawn's friend's boyfriend here is the best protection he can give her right now. My wife and I may not be overly thrilled with arrangement, but we also want the best for our niece."
"

The raven-haired man silently groaned. "Your niece?" he asked.

Nathaniel wordlessly nodded.

"Wow. The cards are really stacked against me, aren't they?"

The other man shrugged. "I supposed that depends on how you decide to play them." He suddenly gave Mark a long assessing look and then sighed in resignation. "I'll tell you what, Markus," he said. "If you really want to know what you're up against, you're welcome to stay for dinner tonight. We eat at six."

"Thank you, Nathaniel. I have no other plans for this evening, so I'd be happy to join you."

"Very good. Now, let's take a look at these documents, shall we?"

Mark stoically nodded, pushing all thoughts of Dawn aside for the time being. "Yes, of course."

26. October 1, 1997: Part 2

Michael sat on the edge of the bed as his lover stood before the closet dressed only in her black undergarments as she decided on what to wear for the remainder of the day. Now that she was eating more, her figure was finally starting to fill out, making her look less like a skeleton and more like a healthy human being. He found the transformation very becoming and had to fight that much harder to keep his hands off her. Even now, he yearned to run his fingers over her smooth skin, making her quiver and moan with pleasure. "Damn," he muttered out loud.

She turned slightly. "Sorry?" she asked.

"Just admiring your body, Karen," the killer honestly replied. "You know I think you're beautiful."

As usual, her cheeks flushed at the compliment. "And I think you're just trying to get into my pants," she said, grinning.

"Perhaps if you were wearing someâ€¦" he bantered.

Karen glanced down at herself, still smiling. "TouchÃ©, Mr. Myers." She turned back to the closet where she pulled out a modest black skirt and a ruby red elbow-length sweater. Then, she disappeared into the bathroom. When she came out, she was fully dressed, save for her shoes.

"You look very pretty, sweetness," Michael offered, watching as she slipped on a pair of black heels.

"Thank you," his partner answered, her tone soft. She sat down next to him and rested her head against his bicep. "Michael, when did you first realize you had fallen in love with me?"

He glanced down at her crown and sighed. "I don't know, Karen," he admitted. "After we first met, I thought about you often, but I wouldn't call it love, more like an infatuation. It was enough to keep me interested in you, but not enough to make me pursue you. It wasn't until a few months before our second meeting that the infatuation turned into desireâ€¦lust, if you will. Over those few months my desire for you intensified, turning into something deeper than just a lustful need. Then, one morning I woke up aching to be with you. That's when I knew the time had finally come to consummate our bond. Later that morning, I decided to take a drive, and my intuition led me straight to an abandoned barn where it told me to wait for you."

Karen raised her head. "Michael, when we finally met, I felt a similar ache, but mine was almost unbearable. I physically needed you."

He nodded, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "After suffering years of abuse at the hands of your father, your subconscious knew you weren't going to survive much longer unless that special connection with me was made, and even then, it was barely enough," he said, recalling those three days she had laid unconscious, teetering on the verge of death. "If it hadn't been for that bond, you would have surely died."

His lover kissed the underside of his jaw bone. "Michael, it was more than just that bond that kept me alive," she reminded him.

He glanced down at her and said, "I know."

She smiled and continued to trail her lips over his skin. "I love you so much."

The killer effortlessly lifted Karen onto his lap so that she was facing him. "Show me," he gruffly commanded.

She graced him with an impish smile as she took the zipper pull to

his coveralls between her forefinger and thumb and slowly began sliding it down the zipper's brass teeth. "With pleasure."

* * *

><p>Dawn had just finished dressing into a tan skirt and a light blue blouse when Karen's moans of ecstasy drifted through the bedroom wall. The blonde girl rarely ever heard the noises associated with the couple next door making love, so she could only assume that her friend was experiencing some intense pleasure. Dawn tried not to think about what Karen and Michael were doing, because every time she did, she just ended up getting all hot and bothered. She didn't need a repeat of what happened the day before, or heaven forbid, just hours before.<p>

The teenager still couldn't believe how close she had come to giving Mark her virginity. They didn't even know each other, and he certainly didn't seem like the type of man care about the person behind the pussy, so to speak. She figured he was all business in work as well as in pleasure. Heck, even after their time together in her uncle's office, he admitted that all he wanted afterwards was 'a good fuck'. Then again, although it would have been a day late, she had almost given it to him. Why? She had no idea. All she knew was that she was physically drawn to him, like a moth to the flame. Dangerous? Absolutelyâ€"which was why she planned on staying as far away from him as possible.

However, staying locked inside her room all afternoon held little appeal to her either, and she couldn't very well disturb Karen and Michael right now. What really sounded appealing to her was curling up on a sofa and losing herself within the pages of a good book. Yes, going down to the library was just the diversion she needed.

Dawn quietly entered the massive room of books and headed straight to the Jane Austen section. She glanced over the titles, finally deciding on Sense and Sensibility since Karen still had Pride and Prejudice in her possession. Satisfied by her selection, the platinum-haired teenager turned her back on the tall shelf and instantly found herself staring into a crisp white dress shirt, partially covered by a gray suit coat. DAMN! she mentally cursed.

"It must be Fate that we keep bumping into each other so often," Mark smoothly said.

"More like really bad luck," Dawn sourly retorted. "I thought you would still be working."

He casually smiled at her. "Your uncle and I decided to call it a day, so I thought I would check out his library. I love books, and I had heard that he owned an extensive collection."

"Well, if you two are finished working, then why not just go home?" asked Dawn.

"Because, honey, your uncle has been so kind as to extend a dinner invitation out to me, and it would have been very impolite on my part to turn it down. Besides, I was actually hoping I'd bump into you again."

The teenager's brow furrowed. "Oh? And why is that?"

Mark drew out a long breath and then took her hand. "Come, let's sit," he said, leading her to a black leather sofa. He sat down on one end while the teenager made herself comfortable on the other, putting as much distance between them as possible. He frowned but didn't draw attention to it. Instead, he said, "Dawn, your uncle told me about your situation and the reason as to why you are staying here. I understand now why you are so—"lonely."

She simply shrugged. "My best friend and her boyfriend are staying here with me, and they keep me company when they can."

The raven-haired man scoffed. "That's hardly the same as having male companionship, though, and I'm sure seeing them together only makes you want it even worse. Isn't that right?"

Dawn's jaw clenched angrily. "I hardly see what business it is of yours."

Mark slid a little closer to her and said, "I know you said you wanted more, honey, but did you still like what we did this morning?"

"You know I did," she sharply replied.

"Then, why not let yourself have a little pleasure?" he gently asked.

"Because I want my first time to be special, Mark," Dawn told him, her tone firm. "I don't want to be out of desperation with some guy I just met. I have more respect for myself than that."

"Then, why even let me touch you in the first place?" he countered. "There's no shame in wanting a little male attention, honey. Really, there's not, and I certainly am not going to think any less of you for giving into your desires."

Dawn stared at Mark, her heart racing. What was it about this man that made her want him so much? "_You_ may not," she said, "but _I_ will." She quickly rose to her feet, gripping _Sense and Sensibility_ tightly against her chest. "I'm sorry, Mark. I never meant to lead you on, but I can't give you what you want. You'll just have to find someone else to satisfy your needs."

He stared at her, hard. "So what, Dawn, you're just going to stay here indefinitely, knowing that your friends are fucking behind closed doors and wishing you had someone to do that with? What kind of life is that? At least I can offer you some male companionship during your incarceration. Think about it."

The blonde girl simply nodded and then briskly walked out the room. As much as she hated to admit it, she was actually contemplating Mark's offer. Sure, she could try to make up with Kyle, but then what? Even if he decided to forgive her, it still wouldn't change the fact that more than just miles separated them.

Then, there was the little voice inside her head reminding her Kyle had broken up with her and had basically given her permission to fuck Mark, if she so chose. Dawn honestly didn't know what to do. She

always felt so safe and comfortable around Kyle, so trying to mend their relationship just made sense to her. Mark, on the other hand, conjured some deep feelings in her that had very little to do with feeling safe and comfortable. She just wanted him, pure and simple.

She grunted loudly, never feeling so conflicted in her life. She glanced down at the novel in her hands and then back at the library door. Hastily, before she could change her mind, she reentered the large room.

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><p>Mark was still sitting on the sofa with a book now lying open across his lap. He looked up from its yellowed pages the moment Dawn stepped into the room. The book shifted slightly as his body responded to her presence. Thankfully, she didn't seem to notice the subtle movement. "Welcome back," he drolly greeted. "I honestly didn't expect to see you again until dinner."<p>

She lowered her romance novel and held it at her side. "I came in here to read, and I decided that I am not going to let you scare me off."

Mark scrutinized the platinum-haired teenager for a long moment, specifically eyeing her flushed cheeks and trembling legs. Her obvious desire for him did nothing but fuel his own deep lust for her. "Is that all you decided?" he huskily asked, his hardness now throbbing painfully against the book's spine. He saw her heartbeat quicken from underneath her light blue blouse; however, her voice remained stern.

"Mr. VanTroy, I would really like to read my book in peace, if you don't mind."

Dawn's lie did not fool Mark. If she truly had wanted privacy, she would have chosen to read her book in a different room. No, she had returned with a different purpose in mind, yet he kept his cool and simply gestured to the cushion next to his. "Very well, Dawn," he said. "You have my word that I will leave you completely undisturbed."

"Thank you," the teenager answered, rejoining him on the sofa. She opened Sense and Sensibility and flipped to the first page.

Mark reluctantly shifted his gaze back down to his book. After a few minutes, Dawn leaned back into the sofa, clearly starting to feel more at ease. They continued to read in amiable silence until she finally turned to him, her cornflower eyes dark with unfulfilled desire. When he reached for her, she did not move or try to run. Instead, she willingly went into his arms and let him kiss her. He slipped his tongue between her teeth and eagerly explored her mouth. Meanwhile, he leaned into her, encouraging her to lie down beneath him.

He eventually lifted his mouth from hers. He didn't say anything to her—"no words of romance or utterances of false promises"—as he undid his pants and lifted her skirt. He slid her white panties down her legs and then settled himself in-between her thighs, intimately touching her with his erection but not penetrating. He then grasped

his manhood in his hand and guided its thick head skillfully over her wet swollen nub.

"Mark!" she gasped as her body trembled with pleasure.

Once she climaxed for him, he released his hardness and grabbed a hold of her hips with both hands. She cried out while he slowly slid himself into her tight slit, yet she did not stop him from sinking down into her wet folds and claiming her virginity. She raised her knees and squeezed her thighs against his hips as he buried himself hilt-deep into her core.

Mark didn't want Dawn to believe for one moment that he felt anything towards her besides lust, so he kept his movements harsh and brisk, making sure she understood that they were fucking, not making love. He wanted to be her companion for physical pleasure only. She had friends and relatives to take care of her other needs.

Dawn started showing signs that she was nearing her peak, so Mark grinded his hips hard into hers, deepening his powerful thrusts. To his delight, she wrapped her legs around his hips, drawing him even closer. She moaned and writhed underneath him while he pumped in and out of her wetness. When her inner muscles finally tightened around his arousal, he delivered one last thrust, which sent them both into orgasm.

Mark felt a little guilty for coming inside of the teenager, but she didn't say anything to him about it as he pulled out of her messy opening, so he assumed she wasn't overly concerned about it. Besides, even if he did happen to impregnate her, he knew someone who could discretely take care of the problem, and no one would ever be the wiser.

Mark sat up and refastened his pants, closely watching as his partner examined the light smear of blood on her inner thighs. "Honey, bleeding a little during the first time is normal for girls," he assured her.

"I know," she said, lifting her pale eyes. "I just wasn't expecting it to feel that good."

He lightly traced her lower lips with the tip of his forefinger. "Pretty incredible, huh?"

"Yes," she breathed.

He added another finger and spread her lips wide open, baring her shiny nub. He then lowered his head and suckled it, making her come, again. "See how good we are together," he muttered just before sliding his tongue into her wet slit. She squirmed beneath him while he licked her insides clean of his bodily fluids and her lost innocence.

"Oh Mark, that's it...right there," she moaned, fisting his hair and climaxing hard.

He raised his head and moved his hands to her backside. As he kneaded her firm cheeks, his fingers made several passes over her nether hole until he finally pushed one of his digits firmly against it. "Would you like to try this?" he asked Dawn. When trepidation entered her

pale eyes, he added, "I'll only use my finger, and if it starts to hurt too much, I promise I'll stop."

At her nod, he turned her on her side. Then, he slowly dipped his finger into the small opening. She instantly yelped out in pain. He paused, letting her get accustomed to the new sensation.

"I'm not sure if I can do this," Dawn admitted.

Mark kissed her shoulder and said, "You're doing great, honey, but we can stop, if that's what you want. It's just something I thought you might like."

Dawn turned her head to look at him. "Will it hurt a lot if you just push it all the way in?"

"Without lube, yes," he truthfully replied. "Listen, honey, why don't we stop for now, and next time I'll make sure to bring some lube with me, all right?"

She nodded. "Along with some condoms?"

Mark sighed as he removed his finger. "I hate condoms," he griped.

"Please, Mark?" Dawn begged. "Just until I get on some birth control? I really don't want to get pregnant."

"Fine," he conceded, "but since you brought up the subject, when exactly did you have your last period?"

"I just got off of it a few days ago," Dawn said, "so everything should be okay. I just don't want to take any chances, that's all."

Mark affectionately patted her rear. "Don't worry about it, honey. I'll take good care of you. Oh, and don't fret about the birth control either. I'll go to a clinic and pick some up for you."

A shadow suddenly crossed Dawn's face. "I appreciate the offer, Mark, but I'd rather have my great-aunt get it for me. She's the one who helps my friend get hers."

"Honey, I'd prefer if we kept this matter between you and me, at least until you turn eighteen."

"Mark, my friend is only seventeen, too, and she's sleeping with a man who's almost forty."

"Yes, but is her father a cop?"

The teenager's expression darkened even farther. "As a matter of fact, he is," she told him. "He's actually the reason why I want my great-aunt to get the pills for me and not you."

"I don't understand," Mark grumbled. "If your fathers are both cops, then why do you need your friend's boyfriend here to protect you? What's so special about him?"

"It's difficult to explain, but you'll understand more once you meet

him. Speaking of which, I should go and tell him that you're coming to dinner," Dawn said as she reached for her panties.

Mark offered her wry smile. "You may want to freshen up first, honey."

"Why?" she innocently asked. "You already gave me a nice bath."

He smirked and said, "You'd better get dressed, Dawn, before I decide to make it completely necessary for you to take another one."

Her blue eyes instantly clouded with passion. "Would you?" she breathed.

He nodded. "Yes, but it will have to be quick. It's getting late."

"I don't care," she replied, parting her legs.

He brought a hand to the waistband of his pants. "All right, honey, let's see what we can doâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Dawn stood in the shower, letting the hot water cascade over her while she rubbed her thighs clean with her washcloth. Left over blood and male fluids mingled together on the yellow piece of cloth, but she gave it little thought as her mind wandered back to the raven-haired man with the piercing emerald eyes. Although she had immensely enjoyed her time with him, she knew their coupling had lacked the loving passion that had radiated from Karen and Michael's intimate union. Dawn held little hope that it would ever be that way between her and Mark. They were bonded by physical attraction only. Still, being with him had eased the loneliness that had begun to consume her. Because of that, she didn't see any harm in continuing their sexual relationship.<p>

Knowing she was growing short on time, Dawn stepped out from the shower and dried off. She gazed into the mirror. Her reflection didn't look any different than it did before, except that her skin was slightly pink, most likely due to the shower than anything else. She doubted anyone would be able to tell that she had just given her virginity away. She wasn't glowing like Karen always did after making love. Then again, Dawn hadn't made love with Mark. As incredible as it had felt, they had simply fucked.

Sighing, the teenager quickly brushed her platinum locks. After smoothing out her hair, she picked up her rumpled clothes and threw them into the hamper just outside the bathroom door. Then, she walked to her closet. She thumbed through the hangers, finally deciding on a simple navy blue dress with a matching cardigan and flats. Once dressed, she left the sanctuary of her bedroom.

Dawn politely tapped on the door next to hers, restlessly shifting her weight from one foot to the other while she waited for Karen to answer. Much to her surprise, it was Michael who greeted her. His obsidian eyes bore into her, as though they were seeing directly into her soul. "Hi," she said, trying her best to keep her tone light. "Is your girlfriend here?"

He nodded and opened the door wider so that teenager could pass through. "She's on the balcony," he told her.

"Thanks, Michael." Dawn walked into the room, trying her best to ignore the smell of intimacy that still hung in the air, despite an opened window. As she neared the French doors, she saw her best friend leaning against the stone railing and gazing out over the horizon. The blonde girl looked at the killer and said, "On the other hand, maybe I really shouldn't bother her right now."

"I think you should, Dawn," he simply replied.

She gave a short nod, knowing Michael was not going to let her leave until she spoke with his lover. Dawn proceeded to walk through the set of doors, which he promptly closed behind her, ensuring their privacy.

Karen instantly turned to face her. As her dark eyes studied the blonde teenager, a slight frown touched her lips. "You slept with him, didn't you?" she bluntly asked.

Dawn nodded, "Yes, and despite what you may think, I don't regret it."

"No, of course you don't."

The bitterness in her friend's tone angered Dawn. "You know, after everything I've done for you, you could be a little more supportive," she spat. "Living here hasn't been exactly easy for me, and seeing you and Michael together all the time just makes it harder. All I want is somebody to give me that kind of attention. Is that really too much to ask?"

"But you don't even know him, Dawn," Karen quietly voiced.

"You didn't know Michael either the first time you slept with him," the blonde girl disputed. "You only knew that you wanted him."

The brunette looked at her crossly. "That's because my feelings for him had been festering inside of me for nearly ten years. That's a little different, don't you think?"

"But your feelings for him had been there from the start," Dawn said, "and I bet if you had been older at the time, you would have slept with him soon after your first meeting. Am I right?"

Karen shrugged. "It's a possibility, I guess, but who can say for sure? All I know is I would have done anything to have been able to give my virginity to Michael."

Dawn nodded. "I know, but Mark didn't steal my virtue, Karen," she gently said. "I wanted him to take it."

The brunette inhaled a deep breath and slowly let it out. "So that's his name, then?" she asked after a moment. "Mark?"

"Markus VanTroy, actually," Dawn replied, "but he prefers that I call him Mark." She gave her friend a long look. "I'll be able to formally introduce you to him soon. My uncle invited him to stay for dinner tonight."

"Oh, this should be interesting," Karen said, without humor. "Does Michael know?"

The blonde teenager shook her head. "No, not yet."

"Well, let's go inside and tell him." The brunette checked her watch. "It's time for me to take my pill, anyway."

"Okay," Dawn agreed, following her companion back into the bedroom.

Michael, who was sitting on the edge of the bed, stood as they entered the room.

"Just a heads up, Dawn's friend will be dining with us this evening," Karen informed him on her way to the bathroom.

The killer shot Dawn an intense look.

"I had nothing to do with it," she insisted. "My uncle invited him."

"I'm not expecting you to join us, Michael," Karen voiced from the adjacent room. "I know you don't normally associate with the Helms, much less when they have company over."

He continued to gaze upon Dawn and said, "I think I'll be able to manage one dinner, sweetness, especially since you're going to be there."

Karen walked out of the bathroom, an expression of shock on her face. Michael instantly turned away from the blonde teenager and fixed his eyes on his lover. "You're serious," she said when she met his stare.

"Very," he replied. "I'm just as curious about this man as you are."

A soft smile touched the brunette's lips. "Well, shall we go downstairs, then?"

Michael moved closer to her and reached for her hand. "By all means."

Karen intertwined her fingers with his. As they started walking from the room, Dawn's attention was suddenly diverted to the white rubber face that was still lying lifeless on the nightstand. "Michael, what about your mask?" she asked.

"It stays," he brusquely stated, keeping his back to the platinum-haired girl.

She trailed behind the lovers and softly closed the bedroom door behind them. Good or bad, she knew this was going to be a memorable night.

Mark reached the dining room with a few minutes to spare. Dawn had yet to arrive, but both Mr. and Mrs. Helms greeted him with smiles. He doubted they would be treating him so amiably if they knew he had just made a woman out of their precious niece. He honestly couldn't think of a more enjoyable way to pass the time than screwing her, though, and he was definitely looking forward to doing it again.

"I'm so glad you could join us this evening," Rebekah said. "Dawn and her friend should be here shortly."

"_Friends_, I believe, darling," Nathaniel politely corrected.

His wife's smile instantly vanished from her lips. "Are you sure?" she nervously asked. "He's never joined us for dinner before."

"I believe he'll make an exception tonight," Nathaniel replied. "He's developed quite a soft spot for our niece, and Mr. VanTroy here has shown interest in perhaps dating her. Isn't that right, Markus?"

Dating? Mark's inner voice sneered. _Try fucking._ Out loud he said, "I must admit I would like to get better acquainted with her."

Mrs. Helms frowned. "If I am not mistaken, Dawn is already in a serious relationship with someone."

Nathaniel gently patted her hand. "Rebekah, darling, you know how fast things can change between two young people."

"_Young_ is the operable word," she firmly stated. "Even if Dawn is agreeable to this, it doesn't change the fact that she's only seventeen. Her parents would ring my neck, if I allowed her to date a man twice her age. No offense, Mr. VanTroy."

He offered her a small smile. "None taken. I understand how our age difference would be of some concern, but I assure you, I would never do anything to harm her."

"I'm afraid it's not Mrs. Helms you have to convince, but _me_, " a man voiced as he approached the group. Walking alongside him was Dawn and a tall brown-haired girl whose hand was firmly grasped within his.

Mark was not one to be easily intimidated, but the stranger's presence made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. However, the raven-haired man refused to let his fear show. "And you areâ€|?"

"Michael," the stranger promptly replied.

Mark met the man's stare and discovered, to his utter astonishment, that the man had jet black eyes. Mark had never seen anything like them before. Who exactly was this stranger? "Just Michael?" he mildly asked after a long moment.

The man gave an abrupt nod. "For now." He then gestured to the attractive brunette teenager standing at his side. "And this is Dawn's best friend Karen."

Mark noticed that Karen also had dark eyes, yet hers were most definitely brown in color. "As I understand it, she is also your girlfriend," he said, purposely not letting his gaze linger too long on her.

"That is correct," Michael simply stated, though the warning in his expression could not be missed.

Mark had to admit the brown-haired girl intrigued himâ€"not in a sexual way like Dawn didâ€"but he sensed that there was a lot more to her than met the eye, just like with her boyfriend. "My name is Markus VanTroy, though I suspect you may have already been told that," he said, glancing at the beautiful blonde teenager standing at Michael's other side.

"It was mentioned to me," Karen curtly told him.

An awkward silence fell over the group until Nathaniel stepped forward and asked, "Well, now that we got the pleasantries out of the way, shall we eat?"

"Wait," Karen commanded. "Where's Eleanor?"

"Unfortunately, she's not feeling well this evening, so she will not be joining us," Rebekah replied.

Karen looked slightly taken aback by this news. "She's sick?"

"A headache," Nathaniel clarified, "probably a migraine. She gets those occasionally."

The brunette girl caught Michael's eye, but if he was concerned about this Eleanor person, he kept his thoughts on the matter strictly to himself. After a moment, the teenager dropped her gaze, apparently realizing the issue was closed.

The party of six moved to the dinner table and sat down. Once the food was served and people started eating, Mark directed his attention across the table to Michael. "So, Nathaniel tells me you're staying here for the girls' protection."

The chestnut-haired man nodded. "More for Dawn's protection now than Karen's, but, yes, they both have been placed in my care for the time being."

"May I inquire as to why?" Mark asked. "From what I understand, their fathers are both members of law enforcement."

Karen's jaw visibly clenched; however, she remained silent.

Michael glanced over at her and said, "In this case, law enforcement is neither needed nor wanted. I will continue to stay here with the girls until the time comes for us to leave."

"Any idea when that will be?"

"Whenever Karen feels ready to return home."

"You ran away from home?" Mark asked, now addressing the brunette

girl.

She frowned. "I suppose you could say that."

"But then shouldn't your father be looking for you?"

"Yes, and therein lies the problem," she said. "I don't want him to find me. I want to go back to him on my own terms."

The glint of pride that suddenly shone in Michael's black orbs was unmistakable. "You will, Karen," he assured her. "I'll make sure of it."

She met his steady gaze and simply nodded. Although no words of affection were uttered between the couple, Mark could practically see the bond of love that they shared. If that's what Dawn meant by wanting more, then she was definitely fucking the wrong guy. He could never give her that, even if he wanted to, which he, of course, didn't. Although she seemed like a sweet enough girl, he just liked what she had to offer between her legs. He would stay with her as long as the sex remained good, but at the first sign of it turning sour, he would move on to greener pastures. That's just the type of man he was.

"So, what did they do to you, Karen?" Mark inquired.

She instantly turned her dark brown eyes onto him. "Who?"

He impatiently sighed. "Your parents. They must have done something pretty bad to make you want to leave home."

"First of all, it's just my dad and me," she tersely replied. "And second of all, it's not something I openly talk about."

Mark instinctively looked to Michael for some answers. The seriousness in the killer's expression told Mark that whatever happened between the brunette and her father went far beyond a mere parent/teenager squabble and that Nathaniel was not exaggerating when he said that Dawn's life was imperil. Although Mark didn't harbor any significant feelings for the pretty blonde girl, he still didn't want to see her get hurt. "Is there anything I can do to help?" he eventually asked.

"Other than keeping the girls' whereabouts a secret, no," Michael answered.

"I won't tell a soul," Mark promised. "You have my word."

The chestnut-haired man gave him a long look and then nodded. "So be it."

Dawn flashed Michael a bright smile; however, Karen appeared less than pleased with the entire exchange. Normally, such a reaction wouldn't bother Mark, but for some reason he felt it necessary to earn the brunette's trust. When she resumed eating, he raised his wine glass to his lips and took a generous sip of the tart red liquid. "I don't suppose any of you would care to tell me where you're from?"

"Haddonfield," answered Michael, which caused everyone else at the

table to stare at him, as though they couldn't believe he would offer that kind of information to a complete stranger.

"Haddonfield, huh?" Mark thoughtfully inquired, returning his glass to its proper place. "That's a pretty famous town."

"Made famous by one person for all the wrong reasons," Karen stated, her tone harsh.

"Wait a minute," Rebekah suddenly interrupted, "You don't condone what happened there?"

The brunette girl raised an eyebrow at her. "Should I?"

"No," Michael sharply replied, intervening on his girlfriend's behalf. She met his gaze, which instantly created a moment of deep understanding between them.

Mark frowned, knowing his was missing something important. "But that happened years ago, and it is presumed that Michael Myers is dead."

"That's a rather bold presumption for people to make, considering no one ever found his body," Michael said.

Mark gazed upon the chestnut-haired man with the coal-black eyes and suddenly realized that he had spent the last hour in the presence of none other than the notorious Halloween serial killer himself. Indeed, Michael Myers was not dead but was very much alive and presently behaving like any other civilized human being. "I don't understandâ€¦" Mark muttered, finally starting to lose his cool composure.

"It's as we told you," Nathaniel voiced, "Michael's here to ensure Karen and Dawn's safety. Let's just leave it at that for now."

The group turned quiet as everyone finished eating. After dinner, Nathaniel and Rebekah adjourned to the parlor while Michael, Mark, and the two teenagers journeyed outside into the courtyard. The girls walked slightly ahead of Michael and Mark, allowing the men a chance to speak privately.

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to earn your trust," Mark said, opening the conversation. "I really do appreciate it."

Michael gave him a hard look and replied, "I'm sure I don't have to tell you what will happen if you break that trust."

The raven-haired man quickly shook his head. "No, that part I understand."

The killer curtly nodded. "Good."

"But something tells me you're not the only one I have to worry about," Mark ventured, casually gesturing Dawn's friend.

"Definitely not," Michael agreed. "Karen's not one to be underestimated, that's for damn sure."

"Is that the reason you chose her to be your companion?"

"I didn't choose her, Markus; Fate did," the killer evenly informed him. "She was born to be my soulmate." Michael's expression suddenly darkened. "Unfortunately, another man believes he is entitled to her as well and has been taking certain liberties with her, which started when she was just a child. That's why she's staying here."

"Please tell me the man you're referring to is not her father," Mark said.

Michael answered by remaining silent.

The raven-haired man stared at the killer in disbelief. Then, he looked at the brunette, who was quietly walking next to Dawn. "Forgive me, Michael, but I find it hard to believe that Karen would suffer through that kind of abuse without doing something to stop it."

"She didn't know it was happening," the killer grimly stated. "Her father claims he loves her, and yet he damn-near killed her with drugs to get what he wanted, the selfish bastard."

The anger behind Michael's words brought a chill to Mark's spine. "This coming from someone who murders people without giving it a second thought," the latter remarked.

"It's different with Karen," insisted Michael. "I love her."

"Yes, anyone with eyes can see that," Mark answered. "What about Dawn?"

The killer's gaze instantly shifted to the pretty blonde girl. "What about her?"

"Would you ever hurt her?"

"No, not anymore," Michael replied. "Over the past few weeks, Dawn and I have developed a close friendship" just like I know that when you decide to move on, I'll be the one picking up the pieces you leave behind."

Mark frowned. "If you're so concerned about her well-being, then why not stop me from seeing her?"

"Because she wants this," the killer bluntly said.

Mark gazed at Michael, confused; however, the finality in the latter's tone suggested that their conversation was now over. Mark's assumption proved correct when Michael called out to Karen. Both girls paused in their steps and looked at the killer expectantly.

"I think it's time for you and me to go back inside," Michael told his partner.

Karen glanced at Dawn and nodded in agreement. Then, the brunette moved away from her friend and strode to the killer's side. "It was nice meeting you, Markus," she politely said.

"Likewise," Mark responded, offering her a small smile.

"Come, Karen," Michael brusquely commanded, firmly taking her hand.
"Let's go."

The killer's abrupt departure did not surprise Mark, nor did the latter take offense to it. He sensed Michael's patience was wearing thin. Mark was just relieved he survived the encounter and that his body wasn't lying in a lifeless heap at the killer's feet.

"I'm sorry, Mark," Dawn softly apologized, closing the distance between them. "I know this must be a lot to take in."

"It's all right, honey" he assured her. "I'm just glad we got tonight out of the way."

"So Michael approves?"

Mark gave his head a negative shake. "Hardly, but for your sake, he's not going to interfere with our relationship."

"Well, that's good at least."

"Is it?" the raven-haired man countered. "After seeing how Michael and Karen are together, I am not so sure. I now understand what you ultimately want in a relationship, and that's not what I'm about. I'm in this for physical pleasure only."

"I know," said Dawn, "and I'm fine with that. Eventually, I'll want to find a man who can give me more, but, honestly, I don't want to get emotionally attached to a man right now, especially since I don't know what my future holds. I just enjoy being with you, that's all."

"Good, I'm glad we're on the same page," Mark stated, "because I really want to fuck you." He then grabbed Dawn's arm and pulled her into a dense thicket of trees, away from any prying eyes. While he unfastened his pants, she laid down on the ground; hiked up the hem of her dress; and shimmied out of her panties. Once he freed his erection, he crouched down between her thighs and hoisted her legs over his shoulders. She groaned softly as he shoved himself into her tight slit. He slammed and in and out of her, making her moan and quiver until he finally emptied his seed deep within her.

Feeling sexually satisfied, Mark slid out of Dawn's body and let her legs drop back to the ground. He tugged up his pants, his eyes lingering on his partner, who was also redressing. "I need to get going now," he reluctantly told her. "It's getting late."

"Yeah, it is," she agreed. "So when do you think you'll be around again?"

"How about Saturday?" he asked. "I could pick you up and we could hang out at my place for a while."

Dawn looked uncertain. "I'll have to run it by Michael first," she said. "I'm not sure he'll go for that."

"Try," Mark replied. "I promise I'll make it worth your while."

She grinned. "Yeah, I'm sure you will."

"Either way, I'll be here at noon," he said.

"Okay, I'll see you then, Mark."

Despite his previous reservations, the raven-haired man drew Dawn into his arms and gave her a deep parting kiss. When he released her, she wordlessly smiled at him and then left the thicket. Mark waited until she safely disappeared into the mansion before walking to his Cadillac, completely unaware that he was being watched.

28. October 1, 1997: Part 4

Timothy McBride sat in the front seat of his silver SUV and lowered the pair of binoculars from his light brown eyes. In the dim light, it was difficult for him to clearly see the two figures standing in the courtyard, even with the help of the magnifying lenses. He needed to move closer to them.

The sandy-haired man stepped out of his vehicle and quietly approached the couple, who had just disappeared into a thick clump of trees. He stood against the wrought-iron fence, watching with perverse fascination as they both unknowingly revealed their most intimate body parts to him. His eyes shifted from the black-haired man's well-endowed package to the blonde girl's exposed crotch.

Timothy instantly reached a hand down to the front of his pants, unzipping his fly. He pulled out his stiff erection and touched its wet tip. He tightly gripped the fence with his other hand as he pleased himself, his gaze never wavering from the girl's moist opening, which was currently being hammered by the other man's large member.

When the girl's juices began to seep from her body, Timothy's breathing turned heavy. He inhaled a deep breath, his nostrils easily catching her unique scent. He pumped his shaft faster and harder until he couldn't take anymore. Grunting softly, he shot his load into a nearby bush.

The sandy-haired man hastily made himself decent and moved away from the fence as the couple finished their tryst. He listened carefully while they solidified plans to meet again on Saturday. He noticed a hint of anxiety in the girl's voice as she spoke about someone named Michael. However, when her companion responded to her concern, he assured her that Michael would not be a hindrance to their plans. The dark-haired man's indifference eased Timothy's nerves. Whoever this Michael person was, he obviously did not pose a real threat to the couple. Timothy assumed the girl was just being paranoid and let it go at that.

Timothy watched the girl leave, lust still lingering in his eyes. However, the instant he turned his gaze onto her partner, it vanished from his expression all together, replaced now with anger. Timothy's twin brother had gone missing back in August, and Timothy was certain the black-haired man was somehow responsible for Alexander McBride's mysterious disappearance.

Both Timothy and his brother had been dealing drugs to David Miller for years, and neither had been surprised when the cop had approached

them, asking to keep a look out for the blonde girl and his daughter's boyfriend. Alexander worked part-time at an all-night gas station, which gave him the perfect opportunity to run into the pair at some point. A couple weeks later, he had called Timothy, telling him that the girl had entered the station. It had actually been Timothy who had followed her to Waukegan, though he had driven only as far as Oakwood Drive in fear of being discovered.

After returning to Haddonfield, Timothy had informed his brother of the blonde girl's whereabouts. Alexander had taken it upon himself to hunt her down and had not been heard of since. Timothy assumed his brother had found the girl but had fallen victim to foul play. Timothy suspected the blonde girl and her partner not only knew what had happened to Alexander but also knew the location of the Miller girl and her boyfriend. Once Timothy found out the truth, he would call David Miller and gladly let the cop deal with his daughter and her boyfriend as he deemed fit. However, Timothy planned to take care of the blonde girl and her companion himself and make them pay for any involvement they had for Alexander's disappearance.

The sandy-haired man returned to his vehicle and pulled out of his discrete parking place. Despite his desire for revenge, he would wait until Saturday to make his move. "Just a few more days, Brother," he passionately murmured. "Then, justice will be served. I promise."

* * *

><p>Karen wasn't sure what to expect when she and Michael entered their bedroom. The tension in his muscles betrayed his anger, yet she nonchalantly sat down at the foot of the bed and looked at him. "You told Markus about my father, didn't you?" she asked, guessing as to the reason behind his rage.<p>

Michael met her eyes and nodded. "If he and Dawn are going to continue seeing each other, then it's important for him to know all the risks involved."

The teenager sighed. "So you gave him your blessing?"

"Only because I don't want Dawn sneaking out to see him. This way she'll feel more comfortable about having him over, and I won't have to keep such a close eye on her."

Karen grunted in frustration. "I hate it when you make sense," she grumbled.

"Believe me, sweetness, I don't like Markus anymore than you do, but I think this is for the best."

"Dawn's still bound to get hurt by him. He's just looking for sex."

"They both are, Karen," Michael corrected. "Dawn's at that ageâ€"

"Please, don't," the teenager pleaded. "You know Dawn and I are both seventeen."

"And look how much you enjoy sex," he pointed out.

"Yes, but I'm in a committed relationship, and I know you love me."

"You didn't at first," Michael reminded her. "Besides, there's always the possibility that Markus' feelings towards Dawn could change, given time."

"Yeah, I suppose so," Karen said, though she highly doubted that would be the case. Markus didn't seem to be the type of man to actually fall in love with someone, but perhaps she was wrong. "Well, since you're giving him a chance to prove himself, then I guess it's only fair that I do the same."

Michael leaned forward and kissed her crown. "Sometimes I forget that you are only seventeen."

"Does it bother you?"

He straightened and looked at her. "Does what bother me?"

"Our age difference."

"Not as much as it probably should," the killer replied, "though I will feel a little better about it once you turn eighteen."

"Only eighteen more days," Karen told him.

"I know," he simply responded.

She sat quietly for a long moment and then said, "If my father's going to try anything, this would be the time for him to do it."

"I am well aware of that, sweetness."

She nodded, again turning silent.

All at once, Michael's head snapped up, his entire body turning stiff. Karen was about to question his actions when she, too, suddenly felt on edge. "Michael—?" she asked.

"Stay here," he sharply demanded. He hastily retrieved his mask and slipped it over his face. Within seconds, the Boogeyman was gone.

Although Karen had wanted to go with her lover, she knew better than to disobey his order. She sat quietly on their bed for a few minutes until she heard Dawn's bedroom door open and then close. The brunette wondered if her friend had seen anything suspicious while outside, so she left her room to ask.

As soon as Karen stepped into the hallway, she saw light shining out from the gap underneath Eleanor's bedroom door. Curious, the brunette decided pay a visit to the woman instead. Karen was just getting into position to knock when Eleanor said, "Come in, dear."

The teenager gave her head a small shake and entered Dawn's great aunt's bedroom. This was the first time Karen had been invited into the older woman's quarters. An aged wedding portrait sitting on Eleanor's bureau instantly caught the brunette's eye. In the photograph, a very handsome gentleman was holding a beautiful young

Eleanor tightly in his arms. She was smiling warmly into the camera, whereas her partner's expression remained solemn, despite the happy occasion. However, the amount of love reflected in his eyes could not be ignored. As if in a trance, Karen walked up to the portrait and traced a fingernail over the man's features.

"Look a little familiar?" Eleanor asked from her bed.

The teenager nodded, definitely noticing similarities between the man in the picture and Michael. "Who is he?" she breathed.

"That is my late husband Victor Helms. He was the love of my life."

Karen glanced up from the photograph and looked at Eleanor. "What happened to him?"

A hint of sadness appeared in the older woman's gray eyes. "He was out sailing on the lake when a storm hit. Two days later, his body was found a few miles up the beach. I cried for weeks after I lost him. I'm just glad you will never experience that pain. If it wasn't for having to care for Nathaniel, I'm not sure if I would have survived it."

"But you're so strong," Karen said, surprised by Eleanor's admission.

"Well, as the old adage states, 'what doesn't kill you will make you stronger'. You and I are both living proof that it's true."

Nodding, the brunette sat down in a chair next to the older woman's bed.

"That was the happiest days of my life," Eleanor reminiscenced, "next to giving birth to Nathaniel, of course. But I suppose most girls dream of getting married at some point in their lives."

"Yeah, I suppose," muttered Karen.

The older woman gave the teenager a long look and said, "I am sure if he was able, Michael would marry you in a heartbeat, dear."

The brunette quickly shook her head. "Oh, I'm not worried about that, Eleanor. When I discovered my father's true feelings for me, I gave up any dreams I had of marriage. Good thing, too, all things considered." She released a heavy sigh. "No, I was thinking about Dawn and of her plans to marry Kyle. I thought she really loved him."

"I'm sure she did, dear," Eleanor said, "but there must have been something missing in her relationship with Kyle for her to accept Markus' advances that extends beyond just sex. At least that is my hope."

"Yeah, mine, too."

The woman's gray eyes suddenly twinkled with humor. "Speaking of Markus, how did dinner go? Did Michael behave himself?"

Karen smirked. "Yes, though at times I wish he hadn't. Still, you

should have seen the look on Markus' face when he began realizing that Michael was the Michael Myers. It was priceless."

Eleanor chuckled. "I'm sure it was. I wish I could have been there to see it."

The teenager eyed the woman skeptically. "Nathaniel told us the reason you didn't come to dinner was because you had a migraine."

The laughter quickly vanished from Eleanor's expression. She stared at Karen for a few moments and then said, "I'm not going to lie to you, dear. It's more serious than a simple migraine. I haven't told anyone else, yet, but I have a malignant brain tumor."

Karen blinked, completely stunned by this news. "Cancer?" she breathed.

Eleanor gravely nodded. "Yes, cancer."

"How long have you known?" the brunette softly asked.

"Only a few days," the woman replied, "but it's already progressed to stage three. The specialists want me to start treatment right away."

"But you're not going to," guessed Karen.

Eleanor shook her head. "Even with extensive treatment, the doctors can't guarantee that it will prolong my life much longer than a few months. Suffering through chemotherapy and radiation just isn't worth the extra time, in my opinion."

"Your family may think differently."

"Yes, I know, but nothing they say will sway my decision. I am not afraid of death, Karen."

"Which is why you've never been afraid of Michael," the teenager noted.

"That is very true," Eleanor agreed.

Karen suddenly frowned. "I wonder how long he's known?"

"I'm assuming since the moment he and I met," the woman answered, without malice. "He is the Boogeyman, after all."

The brunette's frown deepened. Eleanor quickly responded by reaching over and gently patting the younger's hand.

"You can't blame him for not telling me, dear. I've been in denial about my failing health for months, foolishly convincing myself that the symptoms I was experiencing were merely the on-set of migraines. This isn't Michael's fault, Karen; it's mine, and I take full responsibility for it."

Karen swallowed past the lump in her throat and asked, "How much time do the doctors give you?"

"Without treatment, and at the rate the tumor is currently growing, no more than a year," Eleanor honestly told her.

Tears welled up in the teenager's eyes, spilling onto her cheeks. "Eleanor, I d-don't want you t-to die," she sobbed.

The older woman instantly left her bed, crouched down in front of Karen, and embraced her in a tight hug. "Hush, dear, hush. Please don't cry for me."

"I c-can't help it," the brunette said. "It's n-not going to b-be the same w-without you. I'm g-going to miss you s-so much."

Eleanor allowed Karen to weep on her shoulder for a few minutes before finally pulling away. "Michael will be back soon," the woman candidly stated as the younger wiped her eyes.

"Yes, I should go," the teenager agreed, rising from the chair. While she headed to the door, Eleanor returned to bed. Karen turned just slightly and said, "Good night, Eleanor."

"Good night, dear. I'll see you in the morning."

With a nod, the brunette left the bedroom and went straight back to hers. She ducked into the bathroom to freshen up before Michael's arrival. She didn't want him to see her in such a state, so she made sure to lock the door behind her. She turned on the sink's faucet and splashed handfuls of cool water on her face, hoping to erase all signs of her tears. She was in the midst of drying her face when she felt her lover's presence enter the bedroom. As quietly as possible she unlocked the bathroom door and stepped out from the smaller room.

Michael, who had already shed his mask, turned to her, his expression grim. "Why did you lock the door?" he asked.

Karen shrugged. "Habit, I suppose. Did you see anyone outside?"

The killer shook his head. "No, but someone was definitely there. I found fresh tire tracks in the patch of woods across the street."

"I wonder who it was," the teenager said, her anxiety rising.

"I don't know, sweetness, but whoever it was didn't linger long."

Karen instantly walked to the bedroom door and turned the knob.

"Where are you going?" Michael asked.

"To call Dawn's parents. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Karen, you don't know it was him," he softly stated.

"And you don't know that it wasn't," she firmly countered. "I want to make sure that he's still in Haddonfield."

"Karenâ€" "

"Michael, just let me make the damn phone call!" she angrily interrupted, not caring as to what more the killer had to say.

He looked genuinely taken aback by her anger. "All right," he conceded, his black eyes closely observing her. "Just keep it short."

Karen brusquely nodded as she exited the room. Tears once again threatened to fall, but this time she held them at bay by concentrating on her upcoming conversation with Mr. Johnson. She just hoped Dawn's father would tell her what she wanted to hear.

When she reached the main floor, the teenager went directly into Mr. Helms' study. Despite her best efforts to stay calm, her fingers shook as she picked up the cordless phone and dialed Dawn's home phone number. Mrs. Johnson answered.

"Hello?" the woman hesitantly asked.

"Hi, Mrs. Johnson," the brunette softly replied.

"Oh my god!" Johanna gasped. "Karen, is that you?"

"Yeah, it's me," the teenager said. "Listen, is Mr. Johnson around? I need to ask him a quick question."

"Yes, he's here. Let me get him for you."

There was a momentary pause on the line while Mrs. Johnson retrieved her husband during which Karen restlessly paced the floor.

"Hey, kiddo," Mr. Johnson finally greeted. "Is everything all right?"

"I'm not sure," Karen truthfully informed him. "Someone was lurking around the mansion this evening, and I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't my father. Is he still in Haddonfield?"

"Yes, he's still here. In fact, I just spoke with him in person about an hour ago. He's on patrol tonight."

Karen breathed a heavy sigh of relief, though she knew no one was completely safe, yet. Whoever had been hiding out in the woods was still on the loose, and with the person's identity and intentions still a mystery, it would be imperative for everyone to remain extra vigilant until the person was found.

"Karen, if someone was in fact lurking about, then there's a good chance the individual will return at some point, so please be careful. Tell Dawn, too."

"I will," the teenager promised.

"And I'll be sure to call if anything changes concerning your father."

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson. I really appreciate that."

"You're welcome, kiddo. You take care now."

"You, too. Goodbye, Mr. Johnson."

"Goodbye, Karen."

The brunette ended the phone call and set the handset down. Then, she headed back upstairs to hers and Michael's bedroom.

"Well?" the killer questioned upon her entry.

"It wasn't him," she curtly answered.

Michael nodded, silently watching as Karen walked past him to pull out her pajamas from her bureau. She kept her back to him while she changed her clothes, not wanting him to see the tears that once again stung her eyes.

She tried her hardest not to think about Eleanor, but she found the task impossible. Hers and Eleanor's relationship had really blossomed over the past several weeks. The older woman was the only person besides Michael who truly understood the changes taking place within Karen's body. Not only did the older woman accept those changes, but she encouraged them as well. To lose that support now just seemed unfathomable and very unfair.

"Karen, rest assured, I will catch the person who was out there tonight," Michael firmly told her. "I'm not going to let anything happen to either you or Dawn."

His statement was a sobering reminder that he was, in fact, the Boogeyman and that he truly did not care about what happen to anyone else living in the house, Eleanor included. The teenager suddenly wondered if he would be capable of supporting her through this loss, or if she would be forced to deal with it alone, just like when her mother had disappeared. She supposed only time would tell.

"I know you won't," she said, finally turning around. "I'm not worried about that."

The killer gave her an assessing look. "What's troubling you, then?"

Karen shrugged. "I'm just tired, Michael. It's been a long day."

He nodded, though he didn't look entirely convinced by her answer. "All right, sweetness, let's go to bed."

Breathing a small sigh of relief, Karen followed her partner into bed. She crawled underneath the blankets and pulled them up to her chest. Michael then leaned over her and tenderly kissed her lips.

"I love you, Karen," he said, gazing deeply into her eyes.

She raised a hand to his face and lightly traced her fingers over his cheek bone. "I love you, too, Michael," she assured him.

He turned his head just slightly, kissing her palm before setting her hand back down on the mattress. Without another word, he returned to his side of the bed and closed his eyes.

Karen wasn't sure if Michael was actually going to sleep or not, but

she also let her eyelids drop, grateful to be putting an end to the emotionally draining day.

29. October 2, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****October 2, 1997****

Michael didn't know what time he had actually fallen asleep, but his eyes snapped open the moment he felt his lover leave their bed. He silently watched as she padded her way to the bathroom. He remained motionless on the mattress until he heard the toilet flush. Then, he, too, got out of bed and boldly entered the adjacent room.

While Karen washed her hands, Michael sat down on the edge of the bathtub, his eyes meeting hers in the mirror. She still looked uncharacteristically forlorn, which told him that sleep had not cured whatever was ailing her from the night before. "Do you want to talk about it?" he finally asked as she reached for a hand towel.

She dried her hands and then turned to face him. "Eleanor and I spoke last night, Michael. I know that she's dying."

The killer gave his lover a long look, now understanding the reason behind her abnormal behavior and moodiness. After a few silent moments he finally spoke. "I'm sorry, Karen."

She sat down next to him and said, "You've known all along, haven't you?"

He offered her a single nod. "Yes."

When Karen's gaze drifted to the floor, Michael impulsively reached for her hand and absently ran his fingers over her knuckles. He could tell something else was weighing heavily on her mind; however, he let her be, leaving any further conversation up to her.

Eventually, she pulled her hand away from his and rose to her feet. "Well, I'd better get dressed," she said. "Breakfast will be ready soon." She then retreated into the bedroom, gently shutting the door on her way out.

Michael stood and proceeded to take care of his own bodily needs. By the time he emerged from the bathroom, Karen was clothed in an oversized heather gray sweatshirt and a pair of dark jeans. He wasn't sure if it was the color of her sweatshirt or the amount of stress she was under, but her face looked uncommonly pale. "Karen, why don't you stay here and rest while I get you something to eat?" he suggested.

Without hesitation, she nodded. "Thanks, Michael. I'm not really in the mood to socialize with anyone right now, anyway."

"Including me," he flatly stated.

She ran a hand through her hair, an anxious gesture on her part.

"It's not you, Michael," she softly told him. "I just need some time alone to think. Please don't be upset."

The killer calmly shook his head. "I'm not upset sweetness," he said, attempting to ease her nerves. He walked over to his side of the bed and shoved his feet into his boots. "I'll be back in a little while."

"All right," Karen simply replied.

Michael offered her a short nod before leaving their bedroom. Within seconds, he materialized in the kitchen right next to Dawn, who jumped at his sudden appearance.

"Dammit, Michael!" she angrily exclaimed. "You know I hate it when you do that!"

"Which I'm sure is why he continues to do it," Eleanor humorously voiced from the kitchen table. "Good morning, Michael."

"Morning," he mumbled in return.

Frowning, Dawn asked, "So where's your better half? Still sleeping?"

Michael shook his head. "She's not feeling quite like herself today, so I opted to get her some breakfast."

Dawn gave him a scrutinizing look. "Why? What happened?"

Eleanor instantly caught his eye, and he knew she was wondering if he would spill her secret. He quickly turned his attention back to Dawn, ignoring the older woman for the time being. "While you were alone with Markus last night, someone temporarily parked in the woods across the street," he replied, "and it has set her on edge. She even went so far as to call your parents to make certain it wasn't her father."

"You can hardly blame her for that," Dawn said, defending her friend.

"No, but I don't want her falling victim to paranoia either."

"Well, then maybe she should just go back to Haddonfield and confront her father."

Michael soundly shook his head. "No. She isn't nearly ready for that, yet, Dawn. The situation concerning her father is a lot more dire than you think." He grabbed a plate and started filling it with food for his lover. "Hell, not even she knows how dire it is."

Dawn placed a hand on his forearm, her cornflower eyes searching his black ones. "Is it really that bad?" she asked.

Michael set Karen's plate down on the breakfast bar and pulled up a chair for her best friend. The blonde teenager accepted the invitation and sat down. He took a seat next to her, turning his chair so that it was facing her. "Dawn, what I am about to tell you must stay between us. Do you understand?"

She solemnly nodded. "Yes."

The killer stared hard into her eyes and said, "Karen's mother is dead."

"What?!" Dawn breathed. "Are you sure? How do you know?"

"I found her grave in the woods near where Karen and I first met. It was marked by a similar necklace to the one Karen so diligently wears."

Dawn remained silent as she processed his words. When she next spoke, her voice was barely above a whisper. "Murdered?"

"Yes." Dawn placed a hand on his knee, but because she seemed completely oblivious to her action, Michael permitted the rather intimate touch.

"Once Karen finds out, she's going to kill her father."

"I know," he quietly stated.

"But you won't let that happen, right? Right?" When he didn't respond, Dawn's fingers desperately clenched the material covering his knee. "Michael, Karen's not like you. She is not a killer."

"Dawn, that's enough!" Eleanor warned, rising slightly from her chair.

The teenager instantly blinked as though remembering herself. She then glanced down at her hand, her face flushing bright pink. She quickly moved away from Michael, yet she did not apologize for her outburst, and, in all honestly, he would have been disappointed if she had. "Dawn, whatever Karen decides to do about her father will be totally up to her," he said. "I am not going to interfere with her plans."

"And if he strikes first, then what?"

Michael's expression hardened. "Then, rest assured, the Boogeyman will come out to play."

"Good." Dawn returned to her seat and reached for a stack of pancakes. "So, going back to last night, do you think the person who was here had some connection to Karen's father?"

"Yes," the killer firmly answered. "And next time the intruder will not get away."

"Assuming he comes back," the teenager said as she poured a generous amount of syrup on her food.

"Trust me, Dawn; I'm certain he's seen enough to ensure his return."

She instantly glanced up from her plate. "You think he was spying on me?"

Michael gave her a sharp nod. "I guarantee it." Once again, Dawn's

cheeks glowed pink, and he couldn't help but take a jab at her. "It's a bit different when the shoe's on the other foot, isn't it?" he quietly asked, standing. When her mouth fell open, he patted her on the shoulder and then grabbed Karen's plate. "Enjoy your breakfast, Dawn." And with that, he was gone.

30. October 2, 1997: Part 2

Instead of taking Michael's advice and resting, Karen agitatedly paced the length of her bedroom floor, her thoughts solely focused on a dream she had once harbored as a small child—a dream she had forced into the far recesses of her mind in the months following her rape—a dream that had resurfaced with a vengeance all thanks to one particular statement Eleanor had made the night before: _I am sure if he was able, Michael would marry you in a heartbeat, dear._

At the time, the teenager had made light of the woman's comment, not thinking much of it. However, as Karen slept, Eleanor's words had worked their way into her subconscious mind, provoking images and feelings so strong that they had actually jolted her awake. Even now, the memory of it caused her skin to tingle and her heart to race, and for a moment, she found it extremely difficult to breathe.

Feeling lightheaded, Karen laid down on the bed, completely baffled as to why her body was reacting in such a way to a mere dream, especially since there was no hope of it coming true. It just didn't make any sense. Yet, as she stared up at the ceiling, she envisioned herself dancing with Michael, wearing a white gown and veil. He was his usual stoic self, but she was smiling and laughing as he twirled her around the ball room, making her wonder how they had learned to dance so well together. Finally, they slowed to a stop, and he pulled her close, his lips just grazing her ear as he said, "I love you, _Mrs. Myers_."

Karen blinked, and suddenly the ceiling came back into focus. The reverie was gone, leaving behind an oddly empty feeling deep inside of her. She numbly sat up, propped a pillow behind her back, and reached for the copy of _Pride and Prejudice_ that was laying on the nightstand right next to the Boogeyman's mask. Her gaze lingered on the white latex face. Michael didn't like her touching it, which was made evident after their unexpected tryst in the shower just before their first dinner date. Out of respect for him, she hadn't touched the mask since. Today was no exception. She carefully lifted _Pride and Prejudice_ from the small table and set the novel on her lap. Within minutes, the real world slipped away as she was transported to the Netherfield ball.

* * *

><p>Michael entered the bedroom, setting Karen's plate down on the desk before turning to look at her. At first glance, it appeared as though she was reading her favorite book. However, upon closer inspection, he saw that her eyes were not moving along the page but instead were fixated on something only she could see. He had experienced that same phenomenon many times before, especially when it involved something he really wanted such as killing his sisters or being with Karen. Since this was the second time today he had lost her to her thoughts in this particular manner, he could only assume that she wanted something very, very badly.<p>

The killer sat down next to his lover's legs and tenderly rubbed her kneecap. "Karen...?" he softly ventured. She startled hard, which was not like her at all.

"Michael?" she asked, her cheeks flushing with embarrassment. "How long have you been here?"

"Only a few minutes," he answered. His eyes narrowed. "What were you thinking about?"

She glanced down at her book, her blush deepening, yet she remained silent.

"I take it you're not going to tell me?"

Karen mutely shook her head.

"Why not?"

She lifted her eyes to his and said, "Because, Michael, it's just a silly daydream that holds no bearing on reality."

"Is that so?" he questioned.

She soundly nodded. "Yes."

"And yet you still want it."

She released a deep sigh. "Now more than ever, but honestly, up until last night I never gave it much thought."

The hand resting on her knee flexed slightly. "Because of your father?" guessed Michael.

She held his gaze but didn't say anything.

Her lack of response told the killer all he needed to know. "He stole more than your innocence that day he raped you," he said.

Her expression suddenly became guarded. "It doesn't matter," she stated, her tone impassive.

Michael removed his hand from his lover's knee and placed it on her cheek. "It does to me, sweetness," he quietly voiced.

Tears glistened in her dark eyes, yet she refused to crack. "Karen, if you think this will just go away, it won't," he cautioned. "It will keep festering inside of you until something is done to stop it. Trust me, _I know_."

She inclined her head, and a few moments later Michael felt drops of moisture hit his fingers. However, she still did not speak. He knew if he didn't reach his lover soon, he would end up losing her to this new-found obsession. "Come on, Karen," he gently coaxed. "You know you can tell me anything. Please don't push me away."

More tears trickled over his fingers as she met his gaze. "I d-don't want to p-push you away, M-Michael," she sobbed. "I w-want to m-marry you."

Stunned, the killer's hand slipped from Karen's cheek as his mind absorbed her shocking words.

"M-Michael," she said, breaking the awkward silence that had fallen between them, "could you p-please get me s-some tissues?"

"Yes, of course," he replied, standing up. "I'll be right back." He quickly retrieved a tissue box from the bathroom and set it down in front of his companion.

"T-thanks," she muttered, freeing a handful of tissues from the box. Once she cleaned her face, she slid out of bed and treaded over to the desk where she picked up her plate of food.

Michael tilted his head at her. "Karen, what are you doing?" he asked.

Without looking at him, she said, "I'm going outside. I need some fresh air."

"Karen, wait. We should really talk about this."

"There's nothing to talk about, Michael," she firmly declared while opening one of the French doors. "It was just a stupid dream. Let's just leave it at that, all right?" Karen then walked onto the balcony and closed the door firmly behind her.

Instead of following her, Michael observed her through the glass while she sat down on the stone floor and began picking at her breakfast. Eat! he silently commanded. As if she heard him, she ate a few pieces of fruit. After that, though, she lost interest with the food altogether and shoved the plate aside. That did not settle well with the killer. He had to do something to help her. But marriage? He ran a hand through his hair, his eyes still focused on Karen. After all she had been through, he couldn't blame her for wanting to get married, but would it even be possible? She certainly didn't think so, yet there was only one way to know for sure.

Michael left his spot by the French doors and returned to the kitchen. Eleanor and Dawn were both still in the room, but this time they had been joined by Rebekah Helms, who eyed him warily as he approached the table.

"What can we do for you, Michael?" Eleanor asked.

Not being one to beat around the bush, he said, "Karen wants to get married."

Predictably, Rebekah gaped at him, but even Eleanor appeared surprised by his announcement. Good, he thought. At least I'm not the only one.

"Michael, did she tell you why?" the older woman questioned.

He shook his head. "No. However, she did lead me to believe that it was triggered by something you two discussed last night."

A small sigh slipped past Eleanor's lips. "It wasn't triggered by something that was said, Michael. It was triggered by something

that she _saw_. My wedding portrait was the first thing she noticed upon entering my room, and she took an immediate shine to it."

"Damn," the killer muttered.

"Forgive me if I'm wrong," Rebekah said, "but don't most teenagers aspire to marry?"

"I think it has more to do with Karen's father than with her age," Dawn voiced, walking towards them.

Rebekah frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Well, would you really want to share a name with someone who had been secretly fucking you since you were eight years old?"

"Dawn!" Rebekah harshly reprimanded.

"What? It's true," the teenager insisted. "I wouldn't want that stigma hanging over my head any more than Karen does."

"Of course," Eleanor said. "It makes sense that she would be yearning to separate herself from her father, especially with her eighteenth birthday coming up soon."

As Michael thoughtfully regarded both Dawn and her great-aunt, Rebekah's blue eyes fell on him. "Don't tell me you're actually considering Karen's request."

"It seems as though I have no other choice," he replied. "Assuming Dawn's theory is correct, which I believe it is, then Karen's desire to marry is only going to get worse as her birthday approaches."

"And that doesn't bode well for either her mental or physical health," Eleanor added.

"No, it doesn't," Michael agreed, "and she's already showing signs of stress. I can't risk her regressing much farther."

"But if all she really wants is her name changed, then couldn't she do that without getting married?" Rebekah asked.

"Yes," the older woman answered, "but something inside of Karen obviously needs that marital bond." She observed the killer for a long moment, a pensive expression on her face. "I will do whatever I can to help you, Michael, as long as this is something you also want."

"Eleanor, Karen is my soulmate," he said, "and I will do whatever it takes to make her happy. She deserves nothing less from me."

Eleanor offered him a kind smile. "In that case, it looks like we have a wedding to plan."

* * *

><p>The cooler temperatures outside brought Karen back into her room sooner than she would have liked. She considered going downstairs to

return her plate to the kitchen, but she decided to soak in a hot bubble bath instead.<p>

As she was relaxing in the tub, a soft knock sounded on the door. "You can come in, Michael," she said, loud enough so that he could hear her. "I'm just taking a bath."

He entered the bathroom a moment later, his black eyes instantly landing on her.

The teenager shifted uncomfortably under his unwavering gaze. "I'm sorry about earlier," she told him.

He shook his head. "Karen, there's no need to apologize," he said, nearing the tub. "You have a lot on your mind right now. I understand that." He crouched down next to the large basin so that their faces were even.

Karen immediately felt a dampness between her legs that had nothing to do with the water she was sitting in. "Michael," she breathed.

Within seconds his lips crushed hers with such velocity that she barely had time to respond. While he forced his tongue into her mouth, he dipped his hand, sleeve and all, underneath the bubbles and sank two fingers knuckle-deep inside her hot core. She bucked her hips against his palm as he thrust his digits in and out of her. After only a few minutes, she wrapped her arms around his neck, climaxing extremely hard. Yet she wantedâ€"neededâ€"even more from him.

Karen frantically helped Michael undress and practically pulled him in the tub with her. He maneuvered himself behind her, grabbed a hold of her hips, and hoisted her up onto all fours. He then leaned forward, molding his body to hers as he brought his hands around to knead her breasts. Her womanhood instantly tingled in response. She yearned to rub it with her own fingers, but she refrained, not wanting to interfere with her lover's plans.

"Go ahead and touch yourself, sweetness," he huskily commanded, as though reading her thoughts. "Make yourself come."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Karen immediately began teasing her sensitive nub with her index finger. Between hers and Michael's hands aggressively working her body, she followed his order and quickly orgasmed. However, it still wasn't enough, so she resorted to begging. "Michael, please..."

He shifted slightly and pressed his erection against her weeping hole. "You're so wet," he lowly commented in her ear.

Karen impatiently slid her fingers down her moist lips in order to grab at him. "I want you so much," she muttered while stroking his pulsating member.

In return, Michael nipped the shell of her ear with his teeth, which only made her slicker with desire. "Clearly," he replied, chuckling softly.

That did nothing but heighten Karen's sexual frustration. "Michael,

will you please stop playing around and just fuck me already?" she snapped.

Since she wasn't one to use vulgarity, her outburst instantly caught her lover's attention. "Are you sure that's what you really want?" he quietly asked.

Something in his tone warned her against saying yes. Instead, she shook her head and said, "No, I would rather have you make love to me."

He moved his mouth away from her ear and kissed her cheek. "Much better, sweetness," he commended. "You can go ahead and guide me in now."

Karen eagerly obeyed his request. Once he was completely sheathed inside of her body, her fingers crept back up to her swollen nub. As Michael pinched and twisted her nipples, she mimicked his movements on herself while he rocked against her. Her harsh touching brought her to another strong orgasm, forcing her to clamp down hard on his manhood.

"Karen...damn," the killer groaned. He pumped harder and faster, pushing deeper with every mighty thrust.

Karen's body literally felt like it was on fire as she reached her peak. "MICHAEL!" she screamed.

He suddenly gripped her hips, pulling her bottom even closer to him as he emptied his hot seed into her. Afterwards, he stayed buried deep within her, his manhood still very hard. "I want you again," he firmly told her.

"Take me," the teenager breathlessly replied.

And he did.

31. October 2, 1997: Part 3

Much later, Michael gazed down at his lover, who was lying between his legs on their bed. Even though her head was turned sideways, he could tell she was awake by the way her eyelashes batted his chest every time she blinked. He didn't have to ask her what she was thinking aboutâ€"he knewâ€"and he quickly decided it was time to end her mental torment. "Karen, I have to get up," he said.

Without speaking, she rolled onto her back.

The killer leaned over and kissed her. What he had intended to be a brief show of affection immediately escalated into something so much deeper for them both. While they kissed, Karen tugged at his hips. He willingly obliged her, plunging hard into her warm wet depths that were still very sticky, thanks to him.

Despite the fact they had spent most of the day making love, neither of them lasted very long. Karen's eyelids remained closed as she recovered from their tryst, clearly spent. Seizing the opportunity presented to him, Michael rose from the bed and strode directly into the bathroom. He dressed and quickly took care of a few other

necessities before returning to his lover's side. He laid one hand on her pillow next to her head and gently shook her shoulder with the other in an attempt to rouse her.

"Come on, Michael," she moaned. "I would really like to rest for a few more minutes before I have to start getting ready for dinner. Please?"

"But what if I want to do something else?" he asked, tenderly nipping her cheek.

"Like what?" Karen's moodily replied, obviously assuming he was after more sex.

The killer nibbled his way to her ear and said, "Like asking you to be my wife."

"Michael, please, Iâ€™" She abruptly stopped in midsentence, her dark eyes flying open. "Waitâ€™what'd you just say?"

He offered her a reserved smile and carefully lifted his hand. "Look on your pillow, sweetness."

Karen instantly sat up and turned her head. Her eyes widened in shock when they landed on the black diamond, ruby encrusted ring sitting neatly on her chocolate-brown pillow case.

Michael reverently picked up the gleaming piece of jewelry and grasped her trembling left hand. Then, he dropped to one knee next to the bed and asked, "Karen Marie Miller, will you marry me?"

"YES!" she excitedly shrieked, a large bright smile spreading across her features. She barely gave the killer time to slip the ring on her finger before flinging herself into his arms and soundly kissing him.

He chuckled at Karen's enthusiasm as he caught a rare glimpse of the seventeen-year-old soul that was buried deep within her seventeen-year-old body.

She eventually pulled away from him in order to admire her new trinket. She held her hand up towards the antique brass chandelier, turning her wrist this way and that, contently watching the jewels sparkle underneath the light. "It's a very beautiful ring, Michael," she said at last.

"It was Eleanor's," he softly informed her. "We both knew you would appreciate the sentiment behind it."

Tears immediately began to form in Karen's eyes. "I'll treasure it forever, Michael," she said. "Thank you so much."

The killer lovingly embraced her, tightly hugging her to him. "You're very welcome, Karen."

She tipped her face upwards. "So, do you have a date set, yet?" she asked.

"Yes, but that, sweetness, is going to remain a surprise," he firmly replied. "And don't bother pestering Dawn about it either. She is

sworn to secrecy."

Karen pouted, which was a new tactic for her. "Not even one little hintâ€|?"

Michael responded by giving her bare bottom a playful swat. "No. Now, get dressed. I don't want to be the one responsible for making you late for dinner."

"Fine," she conceded. She stood and crossed the room to the closet.

While Karen was deciding on what to wear, someone rapped on their bedroom door. Seeing how he was fully clothed, Michael went to answer it. However, he didn't open it much farther than a crack in order to preserve his lover's modesty.

Dawn was waiting in the hallway, clad in an attractive tea-length lavender dress. "I take it your girlfriend's not ready, yet?" she asked, grinning knowingly.

Michael glanced over his shoulder. Once he saw that Karen had snuck into the bathroom, he allowed the blonde girl entry into the room. "No, not, yet," he replied. "And she's my fiancÃ© now, Dawn."

"Well, that sure didn't take you long," she teased.

He shook his head, remaining serious. "Trust me; it's much better for her this way."

To his sheer surprise, the teenager hugged him. "Congratulations, Michael. I know you'll take very good care of her."

"Thank you, Dawn," he said, "and I promise you I will."

"Aww, it's a Kodak moment."

Michael turned his head to look at Karen. She was standing in the bathroom's doorway with a wide smile plastered on her face. Between that and long teal dress she was wearing, she looked absolutely stunning.

Laughing, the blonde girl stepped away from him. "Hey, Michael's the closest thing I'm ever going to get to a brother-in-law."

Karen chuckled. "Very true."

The killer simply smirked at the two teenagers.

"So, may I see the ring?" Dawn eagerly requested.

"You haven't seen it, yet?" Karen asked, glancing between him and her best friend.

Dawn shook her head. "No, neither Michael nor Eleanor would show it to me."

Karen promptly approached Michael and Dawn and extended her hand.

"Oh, look at it!" the platinum-haired girl exclaimed. "It's absolutely perfect!"

"I know, isn't it?"

Michael observed his fianc  in silence as she showed off her new piece of jewelry. She was positively glowing with happiness. If this was any indication of what was to come, he couldn't wait to see her on their wedding day.

"Well, I suppose we should get going," Karen finally said, tearing her gaze away from the ring and dropping her hand. "We'll see you later, Michael."

"Enjoy yourselves," he said.

Both girls threw him bright smiles as they exited the room. The killer waited for the door to close before leaving to hunt for his own evening meal.

* * *

><p>"So, how was dinner?" Michael asked upon Karen's return to their bedroom.<p>

She shrugged. "The food was fine, but the company left something to be desired  Dawn and Eleanor excluded, of course."

The killer gave her one of his rare grins. "Of course."

"They're the only ones, besides you, who make living here tolerable," Karen truthfully told him. "In fact, once Eleanor dies, I'm not sure if I'll want to stay here anymore. It's going be hard dealing with Nathaniel and Rebekah without her support."

Michael nodded in understanding. "I know, sweetness, but perhaps by that time you'll be ready to return to Haddonfield, or at least close to it."

"I hope so." Karen sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at her fianc . "What about you, Michael? You mentioned before of your plans to hunt down Laurie. I'm assuming that's still on your agenda."

He firmly repeated his former head gesture. "Yes, but my sister's going to have to wait one more year, sweetness." His onyx orbs glinted at her with sexual desire. "This year I'll be spending Halloween with you and only you."

A shiver of anticipation ran down the teenager's spine. "Our first Halloween together," she stated, somewhat nervously.

He knelt down in front of her and cupped her face in his hands. "Yes."

"And you're obviously looking forward to it."

He lightly kissed her lips. "Very much so."

Something deep within Karen stirred, and she couldn't stop herself from asking, "Will we be married by then?"

Michael tilted his head back so that they could see each other better. "Does it really matter?" he countered.

_YES! _Karen's inner voice screamed. However, out loud she kept her reply and tone much more subdued. "I'd like us to be."

"Why?"

"I can't explain it, Michael," she truthfully answered. "I just know that whatever it is you have planned for me on Halloween I want experience it as your wife and not just as your lover."

Michael's expression instantly softened. "All right, sweetness, I'll see what I can do."

She inwardly exhaled a huge sigh of relief. "Thank you, Michael."

He leaned in close and kissed her again. Then, without lifting his mouth, he gently pushed her backwards onto the mattress. Karen smiled against her fianc 's lips. She knew they were about to spend the rest of the night making sweet love to one another, and she would not have it any other way.

32. October 2, 1997: Part 4

**A/N: Chapter 31 is a new chapter as well. **

**WARNING: Readers, this chapter was REALLY difficult for me to write. It contains material (drugging, rape, and murder) that is very disturbing and could be offensive to some of you. In fact, I debated for a long time whether I should just summarize the horrifying and gruesome events that occur in this chapter. However, I decided against doing that, because I wanted you to get a real feel for how dire Karen and Dawn's situation truly is. David Miller is a very sick and twisted man, who deals with very sick and twisted people. That being said, please read this chapter at your discretion. **

* * *

><p>As dusk settled over Waukegan, eighteen-year-old Bonnie Davis left her friend's house and started jogging back to her home, which was located just a mile down the quiet country road. A few vehicles passed her along the way. She didn't take much notice of them until a silver SUV pulled up alongside her, crowding her so that she had no choice but to stop moving.<p>

"Get in," the driver, a sandy-haired man, growled.

Like a deer caught in the headlights, the blonde-haired teenager stood as still as a statue, her powder blue eyes simply staring at the stranger.

He waved a sharp pocket knife at her, instantly grabbing her attention. "I said get in."

Bonnie's body shook with fear as she opened the front passenger door. She sat down next to the man, trying hard not to cry. He gave her an appraising look before releasing the brake. Then, he continued

driving up the road.

Bonnie was just mustering the courage to speak when her abductor moved his hand down to the front of his pants where a bulge was distinctively forming. To her horror, he unzipped his fly, freeing his aroused manhood.

"Ever give a man a blow job?" he asked.

Mortified, she wordlessly shook her head.

"Well, it's not hard," he said. "Just suck my cock until I come and then swallow. Got it?"

Bonnie licked her lips, warily eyeing the knife still in his hand. "Right now?" she nervously asked. "While you're driving?"

The man grabbed his erection and pointed its thick head at her. "Yes, now. I want to come in that pretty little mouth of yours."

Although the thought of tasting his seed sickened her, the teenager leaned over and timidly licked the very tip of his erection.

"Dammit girl, I said suck it!" the man yelled, angrily shoving her head down.

Bonnie gagged as his manhood hit the back of her throat. He quickly removed his hand and grabbed something from the glove box. A moment later he squeezed his fingers between her lips and his hardness and forced a small pill down her throat.

"There," he said, withdrawing his hand. "Wait just a few minutes, and that will help relax you. In the meantime, why don't you touch your pussy for me? That shouldn't make you too nervous." He smirked. "And, to show you what a nice guy I am, I'll even let you keep your clothes on."

Bonnie instantly lifted her head. Although she wasn't thrilled with the idea of masturbating in front of a complete stranger, it sounded a whole lot better than giving him oral. She slipped a hand down the inside of her jeans and underwear, her eyes instantly widening.

The man chortled. "Tasting my cock made your panties wet, didn't it?" he jeered.

She mutely nodded, still in shock.

"Good. That means you liked it."

"I guess so," she reluctantly admitted.

The man gave her a sideways glance. "Well, make yourself come, and you can taste it again."

Although her body had sexually responded to him, Bonnie still felt extremely shy about touching herself while he watched. The thought of him mutilating her with his knife, though, was enough to make her surrender to his demand. She closed her eyes and gradually slid her fingers over her sensitive nub. However, as she slowly teased it, her modesty began to slip away. Soon, it dissolved all together, leaving

behind only lust.

Bonnie continued to play with her swollen nub until she was overcome with an agonizing need to give herself more. Rolling her hips forward, she firmly inserted two fingers deep into her wet folds. She bucked wildly against her fingers, panting heavily as she climbed to her peak. "Oh fuck," she gasped. "It's never felt this good. I'm so close..."

"Excellent," the man replied, clearly pleased.

Even though he was sitting right next to her, his voice sounded oddly distant to Bonnie's ears, yet she gave it little thought. Her only focus now was on finding her release. She thrust her fingers harder and faster, curling them in order to intensify her pleasure. Words no longer seemed necessary as she made herself come.

"My turn now," said the man.

Bonnie was too worked up to disagree. She bent her head over his manhood again, but this time she eagerly took it into her mouth. He ran her tongue up and down his shaft, periodically sucking its large head.

"Oh yeah," he groaned. "That's what I'm talking about."

Bonnie freed her hand from her pants so that she could cup his testicles in her palm. He cursed loudly and then squirted strings of his seed down her throat. Once she finished drinking the warm salty fluid, she let go of his manhood and dropped her head to his lap. Much to her relief, he didn't do anything to discourage her from falling asleep.

* * *

><p>Timothy McBride sat on the edge of his motel bed and stared at the fair-haired teenager lying next to him. The only light in the room came from the red fluorescent bulbs on the neglected "OTE" sign that stood just outside his window, which gave everything in the room, including the girl, an eerie glow. It was actually quite fitting, considering what he was about to do.<p>

Unbeknownst to her, Timothy had chosen this particular girl because she shared similar features to the one he had watched the night before. He leaned over and lightly traced the girl's jawline with his forefinger. The dim light made it quite easy for him to pretend that this girl was that girl, and just touching her warm skin made the fantasy all the more real.

As Timothy trailed his finger down the girl's throat, her blue eyes fluttered open. They were glazed over due to the drug he had slipped her earlier, but he hardly cared about that. A lazy smile touched her lips, causing his manhood to instantly harden. He moved his hand down to her right breast and gave it a good squeeze. Even through her layers of clothing, her nipple responded. She also reacted by moaning softly and arching her back against his hand. Grinning, Timothy crawled up onto the mattress. While he continued to grope her through her clothes, he straddled her thighs, pressing his crotch against hers. She opened her legs wider in anticipation.

The girl didn't speak to him, but her moans increased in volume as he dry humped her. When he was satisfied that she was ready for more, Timothy popped open her jeans and tugged them down her legs, taking her striped panties along with them. He carelessly tossed both garments onto the floor. Then, he lowered his face between her legs and shoved his tongue into her neatly trimmed opening. He closed his eyes, once again imagining that it was the other blonde girl writhing and shaking beneath him. He completely lost himself in the fantasy as a stream of feminine juices flowed into his mouth.

After lapping them up, he lifted his head and opened his eyes, still only seeing Girl Number One. He pulled a condom out of his pocket and unbuckled his pants. Once protected, he moved his body upwards until his crotch was even with hers. He tightly gripped her hips and plunged his erection into her wet depths. Another gush of liquid quickly followed, making it very easy for him to pump in and out of her body. She thrashed her head back and forth on the pillow, moaning even more loudly than before as he forced her into a second orgasm.

Timothy's manhood twitched in response. Suddenly, he pulled out of her sloppy opening and guided his erection to her nether hole. She whimpered while he worked his way into the dry tight opening. He knew he was hurting her, but because she was drugged, she didn't resist him. He rocked against her, which eventually turned into full-blown thrusting.

Caught up in the moment, Timothy reached out and tweaked her swollen nub, rolling it between his forefinger and thumb. He even slapped it several times, enjoying the small shrieks that ensued. Soon, her body began to convulse, and he finally let himself go, grinding hard into her bowels as he filled his condom with his seed.

Shortly after, Timothy withdrew from the girl. Despite the dim light in the room, he was able to see that the outside of his condom was tinged with blood. He glanced down at her bleeding raw hole and merely shrugged at the damage he had caused. By morning, it really wouldn't matter, anyway.

The girl sat up, clearly oblivious to her pain. All the better, Timothy thought. Smiling sadistically, he balled his hand into a tight fist. Yes, he was going to have some fun tonight.

* * *

><p>Red hot pain seared through Bonnie's body as she began to wake from a very deep slumber. She thought she had simply dreamed about having sex with her abductor, but the stickiness and fierce pain she felt between her legs proved otherwise. With effort, she lifted herself up and looked down at her private area. She screamed when she saw the shredded lips of her vagina and the gaping hole just beneath it. The man had absolutely mutilated her!<p>

Overcome with shock, Bonnie continued to stare down at her two orifices. Blood and small bits of tissue steadily oozed from them, staining a wad of grungy towels that had been wedged underneath her bottom in an attempt to keep the bed covers clean.

As Bonnie sat there, she started to experience sharp cramps in her abdomen and began to dry heave. The bathroom door suddenly swung

open. Her abductor rushed to her side and handed her a plastic waste paper basket to throw up in. When she finished emptying her stomach, he carried the basket back into the bathroom and dumped the contents into the toilet. "That's it," he gruffly said upon his return. "Get dressed. It's time to go."

"I-I c-can't" Bonnie stuttered, utterly terrified of what more the man had in store for her.

He eyed her mangled genitals, sighing heavily. "Fine," he huffed, retrieving her garments. While he helped her dress, blood started to pour from her openings, instantly soaking her pants and underwear.

The man swore and once again dashed into the bathroom. He came back out holding a few more towels. Then, he lifted Bonnie up and carried her out into the chilly night air to his silver SUV. He placed the towels on the backseat and then laid her down on them, keeping her on her side in order to control the bleeding.

From her position, Bonnie was unable to see out the window. Every now and then a streetlight would light up the interior of the vehicle for a second, but it wasn't nearly enough to tell her where they were going.

"Are you planning to kill me?" she finally asked.

"Yes," the man sharply replied.

Tears instantly flooded Bonnie's vision. "Why?" she choked out.

"Because I have to," he said. "I'm sending an important message to someone."

The teenager instantly started to sob. "So t-this has nothing t-to do with m-me?"

"No."

"T-then can't y-you please just l-let me go? P-please?" Bonnie's sobs quickly intensified. "I d-don't want to d-die. P-please?"

"Shut the hell up!" the man angrily growled. "I'll do whatever I damn well please with you. Understand?"

"C-can I please j-just call my p-parents first. I r-really want to s-say goodbye to t-them. I l-love them s-so much."

The man suddenly slammed on the brakes, sending Bonnie painfully to the floor. "ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH!" he bellowed. "GET OUT OF THE CAR! NOW!"

The blonde girl rolled over onto her belly and tried to get up. However, she was too weak from blood loss to do so.

"Jesus Christ!" the man hissed, exiting the SUV. Moments later, the back door flung open. He grabbed a hold of Bonnie's arms and dragged her out onto the shoulder of the deserted road.

She didn't dare make another sound until he squatted down next to her and unsnapped her jeans. "No!" she cried. "Please, no! It hurts too much! Please, don't do this to me! Please!"

Ignoring her hysterical pleas, the man unfastened his pants and slammed his erection straight into her mangled womanhood. Bonnie screamed. The pain was just too much for her to bear. The last thing she felt was the man's savage thrusts as he literally fucked her to death.

* * *

><p>Only when the blonde girl's heart stopped its frantic beating did Timothy finally pull away from her. He was still incredibly hard, so he masturbated next to her lifeless body, sending his seed into a ditch of standing water. He then rolled her body down the small embankment where it landed with a soft splash as it hit the shallow pool.<p>

Timothy was certain that once traffic picked up, someone would discover the body during their morning commute and alert the police. He just hoped Girl Number One would get the point he was trying to make: her time was comingâ€"and soon.

33. October 3, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

****October 3, 1997****

"Here's your coffee, Sheriff Miller. I'm really sorry about the wait."

David offered the brunette waitress a warm smile. "No worries, Matilda. I can see that you're busy," he said, gesturing to the booths and tables that were filled with other patrons. "Jerry's running late, anyway."

When the bell on the door sounded, David looked over the woman's shoulder and subtly waved to the bald robust gentleman, who worked as a bouncer at a local nightclub. Jerry acknowledged the cop with a sharp nod. As the bouncer made his way to the table, Matilda once again caught David's attention.

"I don't mean to mettle, Sheriff," she said, "but would you mind me asking how Karen is doing?"

"I don't mind at all," he truthfully replied. "The treatments seem to be working, but it will be awhile yet before she's ready to come home." He leaned forward in his seat and added, "Rest assured, though, I don't hold any grudges against her and will welcome her back with open arms."

The waitress placed a fluttering hand over her ample bosom. "Bless your heart, Sheriff," she said. "I wish my father had been as understanding as you."

"Yes, well, I am doing my best." David took a sip of his fresh-brewed coffee. "However, some days are definitely more trying than others."

"Of course they are," Matilda emphasized. She suddenly shrieked as a pair of muscular arms wrapped themselves around her full waist and a pair lips kissed her flushed cheek.

"How's my favorite waitress doing today?"

"Jerry, you must know by now that flirting with me is not going to get you a free meal."

Chuckling, he released the woman and sat down across from his friend. "Fine, but what about a free cup of coffee? I had a very long night."

Matilda grinned at him. "I think I can manage that. She flipped his mug over and filled it to the brim.

"Thanks, Mil; you're the best."

She laughed. "Now, that will earn you a free breakfast. Do you want the usual?"

"You know it."

When she left to take the order to the kitchen, the two men got right down to business. Jerry began the conversation by saying, "I spoke with Spike early this morning, and he still hasn't heard anything from Alexander. Also, Timothy missed a drop last night, which has never happened before."

"Shit," David muttered. "I bet Timothy went to look for his brother."

"Where?"

"If I had to guess, I would say Waukegan. Johanna Johnson has family who live up there, and I'm sure that's where Dawn is staying."

"Do you want me to send someone?" asked Jerry. "Because I can."

David was about to respond when Matilda returned with their food. She set their plates down in front of them and topped off their coffees. She was just getting ready to leave when Jerry suggestively tugged at the hem of her black skirt. The cop took a sip of his hot beverage, pretending not to have noticed the sexual gesture.

"So, Mil, what time does your shift end today?" Jerry asked.

"Two, why?"

The bouncer lowered his voice and said, "You know why."

Over the rim of his mug, David saw Matilda blush.

"All right," she simply replied.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," she confirmed. "I'll see you at two."

The cop waited until the waitress was out earshot before lowering his drink and snickering at his companion.

"I can't help that I like fucking larger women," Jerry said, keeping his voice quiet. "Not to mention it's been awhile, if you know what I mean."

David nodded. "Tell me about it," he retorted, matching the other man's tone.

Frowning, Jerry bit down on a slice of toast. "So take a page out of Karen's book and find someone else in this town to screw. She'll never know."

The cop shook his head. "I don't have any desire to fuck someone else. I only want her."

"Then why the hell aren't you doing more to find her?" the bouncer hissed.

"Because, I need her boy toy and Dawn out of the picture first," David calmly answered while scooping up some scrambled eggs with his fork. "As long as she has them, she'll continue to fight me. However, once she realizes that I will kill anyone who comes between us, she'll have no choice but to submit to me."

"In that case, let me send someone to Waukegan."

"No. I trust Timothy. If he's up there, he'll take care of business. He's much more ruthless and cunning than his brother."

"So, what do you think happened to Alexander?"

David shrugged. "I don't know. I can't imagine Dawn killing anyone, but perhaps her family has hired security. From what I understand, Johanna's sister married very well."

Jerry smirked. "Sounds like it would be the perfect hideout spot for Karen and her lover, too."

"Perhaps," the cop agreed, "but according to Derek, Karen severed her relationship with Dawn shortly after leaving Glenview, which makes sense. I know Karen would do everything in her power to protect her friend from my wrath."

"That I get," Jerry said. "What I don't get is why Dawn suddenly skipped town. Something must have spooked her."

"That's the part I don't understand either," David admitted.

Jerry shifted slightly in his chair. "I should have taken care of her while I had the chance."

"It would have been difficult with her parents around, and it would have raised too many questions," the cop argued. "It's actually better for us that she left. It will make explaining her

disappearance a little easier."

The bouncer downed the rest of his coffee and rose to his feet. "Well, if you don't hear anything from Timothy and want to send someone else up to Waukegan, just let me know."

"Thanks, Jerry. I appreciate your help in this matter."

"No problem, Sheriff. I'll see you around."

David took out his wallet and placed a generous tip on the table. Then, he, too, moved towards the door, smiling charmingly at the other diners on his way out of the small establishment.

* * *

><p>Derek Johnson was in the midst of making love to his wife when the phone next to the bed abruptly rang. As he reached for the receiver, Johanna grunted in frustration. He looked down at her, mouthing 'sorry' while he raised the receiver to his ear. "Hello?" he answered.<p>

"Derek, hello. This is Officer Bill Moreson speaking."

"Bill, yes. How are you?"

"Honestly, I could be a lot better. I'm calling you because a body of a blonde-haired young woman was just found five miles West of Oakwood Drive. I'm at the scene as we speak."

The blood instantly drained from Derek's face. "Dawn?" he automatically questioned.

"_Dawn?_" Johanna repeated, her face also blanching. "What about Dawn? What's going on? Derek...?"

He placed a finger to her lips so that he could hear the reply.

"No, it isn't Dawn," Bill said, "but, Derek, you should see the girl's body. She was brutally rapedâ€"and I mean brutally. It's a god-awful sight." There a slight pause on the line as the cop composed himself. "Derek, nothing like this has ever happened in Waukegan before," he continued, "and whoever did this is still on the loose. Just between you and me, I'm worried about Dawn. I know you told me that she has someone looking out for her safety, but I'm not sure if it's going to be enough. This man is out for blood. I would like your approval to post an officer at the Helms' residence just as a precautionary measure."

Derek instinctively shook his head. "No, that will not be necessary, Bill. Dawn's protector is more than capable of taking care of her. You have trust me on this. Please."

"Derek, I'm sorry, but for my own peace of mind, I'm still going to send someone over there. I don't want Dawn to end up like this poor girl."

Derek grunted in frustration. "Before you deploy someone, at least give me a chance to call my in-laws and explain the situation to them."

"You have one hour," Bill warned. Then, the line went dead.

The other cop cursed loudly, surprising his wife.

"Derek, hun, what's going on?" she asked.

Without wasting any time, he dialed the Helms' phone number. "You'll know soon enough," he said as the line started to ring. He didn't have to wait long for someone to answer.

"Helms residence," greeted a hesitant female voice.

"Rebekah?" he countered. "This is Derek Johnson."

"Oh, hello, Derek. You soundâ€"strange. Is something wrong?"

"Yes, and time is of the essence. I need to speak to Michael, if he's available."

The cop could practically hear Rebekah's frown over the phone. "Michael? Yes, I'm sure he's around here some place. The question is where..."

"Rebekah, please, it's very important that you find him for meâ€"and quickly."

"All right, hang on..."

Johanna's face contorted with fear. "Derek, what the hell's going on?"

In the background, he could hear Rebekah's footsteps as she hunted for Haddonfield's notorious serial killer. "Come on..." he muttered impatiently. Louder, he said, "Give me a few minutes, Jo. Please?"

She sighed in recognition and reached for her lilac bathrobe. "Fine. I'll go downstairs and start breakfast." She slid out of bed; donned her robe; and walked out the door, giving Derek some much needed privacy.

At last, he heard muted voices on the line and then a soft rustling sound, indicating that Rebekah was passing the receiver to someone. A second later an unfamiliar man's voice said, "Hello?"

"Michael?" the cop asked, stunned that the killer, who was renowned for his silence, had been the first to speak.

"Yes."

Get it together, the cop's internal voice chided. He cleared his throat and said, "This is Deputy Derek Johnson, Dawn's father. I just received a call from one of my comrades, who works on the Waukegan police force. He informed me that a body of a rape victim was found within a few miles of the estate." When the killer didn't respond, Derek said, "Michael, the young woman had blonde hair."

"A message," the killer bluntly stated.

"So it would seem," the cop grimly agreed.

"Damn."

"There's more," Derek continued. "My comrade is bound and determined to send someone to the estate in order to keep an eye on things."

"That would be a fatal mistake," warned the killer.

"I know."

Both men remained silent until Michael asked, "When was the body found?"

"Within the past hour," replied Derek. "My comrade called me from the crime scene. Michael, you should know, too, that the victim was tortured before she was killed. If that's any indication of what the perpetrator has in store for Dawn, then I want him dead. I would hunt down and kill the bastard myself, buâ€" "

"Then come here and do it," the killer gruffly interrupted. "And bring your wife with you."

A quiet click immediately followed Michael's stern words, leaving the cop with no other option but to hang up his receiver as well. Derek sat on the edge of the mattress, dazed, until the urgency of the situation came crashing back down onto him. He leapt to his feet and raced to the dresser. "JOHANNA!" he shouted while shoving his head and arms into one of his old university sweatshirts. He then jumped into a pair of faded jeans and grabbed a suitcase from the closet. He was about to call for his wife again when she finally appeared in the doorway. "Get dressed and packed," he breathlessly instructed. "We are going to Waukegan."

34. October 3, 1997: Part 2

****Waukegan, Illinois****

Hot rage burned through Michael's veins like molten lava while he hiked through the dense foliage surrounding the Helms' estate. He was gripping his knife so tightly in his fist that his fingers were now starting to tingle from lack of blood flow. However, the chase was almost over. His quarry was now in sight and successfully trapped within a thicket of trees. The Black Labrador's nose twitched as it caught his scent, and he could practically taste the animal's fear as it turned its large head to look at him.

Michael stealthily approached the canine, raising his blade, which gleamed brightly in the midmorning light. The dog snarled and then lunged at him. He effortlessly caught the dog by the throat with one hand and slammed his weapon into its back with the other. The animal instantly went limp in his hand; however, it wasn't nearly enough to appease his rage. He wrenched his knife free and repeatedly stabbed the canine's dead body until all he was left holding was its head, which he tossed unceremoniously to the ground.

As Michael stood there staring down at the carnage by his feet, a familiar presence approached him from behind. The ease in which she

had found him proved their bond's strength. Still, in light of everything that had happened, he was far from impressed with her new-found tracking abilities. "You shouldn't be out here," he harshly reprimanded, without turning. "You should be with Dawn."

"Dawn's getting ready for her parents' arrival," Karen evenly informed him, "and I wanted to make sure that you were all right." She walked to his side and looked at him, ignoring the dog for the time being. "_Are_ you all right?"

"I'm angry," he replied.

"Yes, I can see that," she said, averting her eyes to the ground and studying his handiwork. "Maybe inviting Dawn's parents here wasn't such a good idea after all..."

"She needs them here, Karen," insisted Michael. "I am not her parent, nor is that my role to fill. I am her protector, her guardian."

"And her friend," the teenager added, her dark orbs once again finding his. "That's why you're so angry, Michael. If that had been Dawnâ€" "

Michael's jaw twitched with rage. "That will never be Dawn," he growled. "I will make sure of it."

"Only you?" she quietly asked, her gaze returning to the ground in front of them.

The killer suddenly blinked as though seeing his lover for the first time. She was acting too calmâ€"too placidâ€"and the way she kept staring down at the carnage at their feet, not with disgust but with morbid fascination...he could practically see the wheels in her head turning. "And possibly Dawn's father," he finally answered. When she opened her mouth to protest he said, "Look, Karen, you once told me that you don't want to become a killer. If that still holds true, then you need to stay out of this."

"I know," she simply responded.

She understood, but would she heed his advice? At this point it was impossible to tell. Her blank facial expression gave nothing away.

Realizing there was nothing more he could say or do to deter the teenager from getting involved, Michael pocketed his knife and then reached for her hand. "Come, sweetness," he encouraged. "The Johnsons will be here soon, and I should probably clean up before I meet them."

Karen raised her eyes and nodded. "Yes, of course."

Without ceremony, the killer transported him and his lover directly into their quarters. She stood in the center of the room, watching him as he strode to their bureau. He slid the bottom drawer open to view the contents inside. He gradually sifted through the stacks of men's clothing, finally pulling out a pair black jeans and a plain black sweatshirt. Now, this was definitely something novel for him. Although he wasn't thrilled about wearing something other than his mechanic's uniform, it was imperative for him to make a good first

impression on Dawn's parents in order to retain their trust.

Michael turned back towards Karen. "I'm going to take my shower now," he told her.

She nodded, letting him go.

Once in the bathroom, the killer kicked off his boots. However, he left his coveralls on as he stepped into the stall. Within minutes hot water was cascading over him, rinsing his garment clean of the blood and gore that had splattered on it while mutilating the Labrador's body.

At the time he had considered taking Karen with him on his spontaneous hunting trip, but now he was glad he had left her behind. Instead of slaking her desire for blood, he was certain it only would have made it worse. Even though there wasn't anything that could be done to stop her from killing her father's associate, he was determined not to encourage it either—"yet another testament of his love for her.

Michael undressed and poured some shampoo into his palm. Of course Karen wasn't the only person whom he loved, as evident by his impulsive decision to invite the Johnsons to the mansion. He never thought he'd be capable of loving one person, much less two, yet over the past few weeks, Dawn had managed to weasel her way into his heart. Now he wanted to protect her, not just for Karen's sake but for her own as well.

The killer rinsed his hair and moved on to wash his body. There was no doubt that being with Karen was changing him as much as it was changing her. He supposed that was inevitable; however, because he had never experienced love before, he had greatly underestimated its power. His and Karen's love for each other had created an intangible bond between them—"one that would now be impossible to destroy.

When he finished cleaning himself, Michael turned off the water and reached down for his uniform. He wrung most of the moisture from it before slinging it over one of the glass walls to let it dry. Then, he walked out of the stall.

Michael dried his body off with a large fluffy towel and put on the clothes he had chosen to wear for the day. They felt foreign and constricting, nothing like the baggy uniform he was so accustomed to wearing. Not only that, but there wasn't a place to put his knife. He certainly didn't need the sharp weapon to kill, but he still felt naked without it.

Sighing heavily, the killer left the bathroom. Karen, who was seated in a desk chair, instantly met his gaze, frowning slightly. "Michael, what's wrong?" Her eyes suddenly widened, and the frown instantly dissipated from her lips. "Wow," she breathed. "That's a _really_ good look for you, Michael."

"Yes, well, don't get used to it, sweetness," he cautioned. "As soon as it's ready, I'm changing back into my uniform."

"That's probably not a bad thing," she said, rising to her feet.

The killer could see Karen was getting worked up just by staring at him. In turn, his manhood pulsed hard against the front of his jeans. Without wasting any time, she dropped to her knees in front of him and tugged the zipper down. He was about to object, but all reasoning left his mind as she took him deep into her mouth.

Michael bent his head and watched his fiancée pleasure him. He grunted loudly when she gently bit down on his hardness and swirled her tongue around its head. He felt her smile as it twitched forcefully under her ministrations. "Karen..." he groaned, tangling his fingers in her hair. Her dark eyes locked with his. That was enough to send him right over the edge.

Once she finished gulping down his fluids, Michael yanked Karen up into his arms and kissed her full on the mouth. "You are a very naughty girl," he lightly scolded against her lips.

"Yes, but you love it," she muttered.

He affectionately nipped her bottom lip and said, "Only because I love you." Her expression changed just then, and he instantly knew what she wanted. "Karen, the Johnsons are here. We should really go downstairs and—" "

"Please?" she softly pleaded, lightly stroking him. "I'm sure Dawn wouldn't mind some time alone with her parents, anyway."

Michael shook his head in resignation as his manhood once again stiffened. He reached down between him and Karen and slid a hand into the front of jeans. Not surprising, the front of her panties were already damp with moisture. It still amazed him how strongly their bodies reacted to each other.

He skimmed his forefinger over the wettest spot, barely grazing it, purposely teasing her. "Is this where you want me?" he huskily asked.

"Yes, oh yes," she whined. "Please—"

When Karen tried moving closer to his probing finger, Michael withdrew his hand completely and grabbed her wrist, pulling her hand carefully away from his throbbing erection. Using his other hand, he popped open her jeans and pushed her clothing down to her knees. Then, he guided her hand to her wet center. He slid his hand over hers and slowly moved their index fingers to her nub that was already swollen with need. He firmly grasped her finger, manipulating it to do his bidding. When both their fingertips touched her little bundle of nerves, she jumped, her lips parting slightly as she inhaled a sharp breath. He bent his head and leisurely traced her mouth with the tip of his tongue while their fingers slowly encircled her sensitive nub.

"Michael," Karen breathed, "I want to watch. Please?"

He kissed her lips and then took a step back, giving in to her request. His eyes followed hers as they dropped to the area between her thighs. She opened her legs wider, which provided them both a better view. Together they rubbed and flicked her enlarged, taut, and extremely wet nub. "I don't recall ever getting you this excited during foreplay," the killer gutturally noted.

"This is very erotic, Michael, and it feels incredible," Karen evenly answered. "I love feeling what you feel when you touch me and seeing what you see."

"Well, in that case—" He withdrew their fingers and raised them to her face. "What about smelling?" He seductively questioned, brushing them against her nostrils. He attentively observed her while she inhaled her own scent, becoming quite aroused himself. "And then there's my second personal favorite—" He slid their digits down to her mouth and pushed them between her lips. "Tasting." He twirled their fingers around her tongue, offering her a sample of her sweet nectar. "Speaking of tasting—" He extracted their fingers from her mouth and once again lowered them to her wetness. Then, he knelt before her. Although his patience was beginning to wane, he kept his movements deliberate as he pressed their index fingers into her warmth. He heard her breath catch but that was nothing compared to the long throaty moan he received when he added his tongue.

"Michael—oh fuck," she groaned.

The killer yearned to reprimand Karen for using such foul language. Since his mouth was busy, he resorted to spanking. The gush of liquid that instantly followed genuinely surprised him. So, his lover didn't mind a little pain mixed with pleasure—"good to know. He repeated the sharp slap and greedily lapped up the reward that ensued.

"Was that one really necessary?" she grumbled, though it was quite obvious that she had enjoyed the punishment just as much as he had enjoyed dishing it out. Yes, that would definitely come in handy later on.

Michael answered Karen's inquiry by thrusting their fingers and his tongue deeper into her wet hot core. She dug the fingernails of her free hand into his scalp, silently warning him she was about to climax. He immediately backed away from her, rose to his full height, and bent her over the wooden writing desk. He gave her bottom one last sound smack before entering her from behind. She was more than ready for him by this point, making it very easy for him to slide in and out of her. While he reached an arm around her and played with her nub, he eyed her nether hole, wondering how she would feel about exploring that aspect of her sexuality. Something told him to wait, but the desire to try it was there nonetheless.

When the teenager's body started to spasm, Michael leaned forward, pushing himself farther into her as he found her left ear. "Just so you know, sweetness, this is my first personal favorite," he softly told her. "Nothing can compare to actually being inside of you." He nuzzled her earlobe with his lips and added, "I love you, Karen." His words her only added to the ferocity of her orgasm. He was quick to follow, coming painfully hard.

Instead of collapsing on top of her, Michael pulled his lover her up against him and lowered them to the floor, being careful not to sever their intimate connection just yet.

"Holy cow, Michael. That was really intense," she stated while they spooned.

He tenderly nipped the shell of her ear. "I know."

"By the way," she said, "I love you, too."

Karen relaxed in his arms, and the killer instantly decided that meeting Dawn's parents could wait a bit longer. Right now this was where he needed to be, peacefully resting with his one true love.

35. October 3, 1997: Part 3

Dawn sat on a tan suede sofa in the family room sandwiched between her mother and Rebekah. Her father was sitting on the other side of her mother, his lips set in a grim line. Even though the local news was in commercials, his steel-blue eyes remained focused on the large television screen in front of them, giving the impression that he was lost in thought.

"So, honestly, how has it been having Michael here?" Johanna asked Rebekah.

The older sister shrugged. "It hasn't been that bad, I suppose. He doesn't socialize with Nathaniel or me very often, but the times he has, he's been decent towards us. Still, it's hard for me to fully trust him. The girls are too young, but I remember what he did back in seventy-eight. It doesn't matter how decent he treats us; it will never change the fact that he is a ruthless killer."

Johanna nodded in understanding. "That's why Derek is having such difficult time with this. He wants to do what's best for the girls, yet he is also a man of the law."

Dawn studied her father, who was still staring at the television. She suddenly felt guilty for never taking into consideration the toll this entire situation was taking on her parents. Her father, especially, looked particularly weary.

"Well, if it's any consolation, Michael does care for both girls," Rebekah said, "and I do trust that he would never harm them."

Dawn instinctively touched her neck where the tip of Michael's knife had wounded it. She was certain no one else would have been able to stop the Boogeyman from killing them just by shouting out his name. That in itself was enough to prove that he valued her life. However, what had sealed the deal was the sincerity in his expression when he had promised her that he would do everything in his power to protect her from the man who had murdered and raped the other blonde girl.

In contrast, his fiancÃ©'s expression had been impossible to read. If she had been angry about the threat to Dawn's life, then the brunette had kept it very well concealed.

"Speaking of the girls," Derek said, turning his head away from the television, "how is Karen doing?"

"Karen?" Johanna asked, both sounding and looking surprised. "Derek, for once this isn't about her. It's your daughter's livelihood that is being threatened, not hers."

"Yes, but I don't have to worry about Dawn going out and killing the man responsible for this heinous crime," the cop replied. "I need to know what Karen's state of mind is right now."

"She's fine, Dad," the blonde teenager quickly assured him. "She wasn't the one furious about the news of the girl; Michael was. In fact, after he talked to us, he immediately left to go hunting."

"And Karen stayed with you?"

Dawn nodded. "Up until I took my shower. Then, she went to find Michael." Her pale eyes suddenly narrowed. "You don't think she'd really go after this guy, do you?"

Derek shrugged. "It's hard to say, Dawn. I'll know more once I see her."

He didn't have to wait long. A few minutes later the engaged couple strolled into the family room. During her time away, Karen had exchanged her gray sweatshirt and blue jeans for a forest-green wool sweater and a pair of black jeans. Yet, it was the killer's transformation that Dawn openly gaped at, her heart fluttering slightly. When he caught her gaze, she instantly cast her eyes to her parents and said, "Mom, dad, may I introduce to you Michael Myers. Michael these are my parents Derek and Johanna Johnson."

Despite their mixed feelings about him, her parents rose to their feet to greet the killer. Her father even went so far as to offer him a handshake. Michael stared at the cop's hand for a long moment but then firmly returned the cordial gesture.

"Thank you for taking such good care of my daughter," Derek graciously said. "My wife and I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome," the killer replied. He took a small step back, allowing the cop to address Karen next.

She and Derek regarded each other, each not uttering a word. Finally, he broke the awkward silence by saying, "It's good to see you again, kiddo."

The brunette teenager stiffly nodded. "You, too, Mr. Johnson."

After a few more quiet moments passed, he reached down into his jeans' pocket and pulled out a silver key. "Since we wanted to leave Haddonfield undetected, we took your car," he explained. "This, kiddo, belongs to you."

Dawn's eyes immediately darted to Michael. She prayed he would intercept the key as her father handed it to Karen. Although a hint of concern flickered over the killer's features, he remained completely stationary, much to the blonde girl's dismay.

"Thanks," Karen muttered, impassively slipping the key into her coin pocket. Then, she sat down on a love seat by the window and simply stared out the glass.

Michael remained standing, his gaze shifting from his lover to Derek.

"Have there been any new developments in the case since this morning?" he asked.

Dawn glanced over at Karen, hurt by the lack of interest her best friend was showing.

"Sort of," the cop replied. "The victim's name hasn't been released, yet, but a girl named Bonnie Davis was reported missing by her parents very early this morning, and her description matches that of the victim's. Bonnie was eighteen and attended classes at College of Lake County's lakeshore campus, which isn't too far from here."

Michael nodded, his obsidian eyes traveling back to Karen, who was still looking out the window. "Do they have any leads as to who might have killed the girl?"

Derek gave his head a deliberate nod. "They have one so far. A manager of a motel said he saw a man carrying someone out of one of the rooms early this morning, but the manager claimed it was too dark to see exactly what was going on. However, the police and forensic units are at the motel conducting investigations as we speak. I'll keep you updated on their findings."

"I would appreciate that," said Michael, "though I think we'll find out who the killer is soon enough."

"I'm assuming you plan to wait for him here, then?" Johanna voiced.

Michael turned to face her. "Considering none of us knows the man's identity, I believe waiting for him here is the most logical approach to take. Do you not agree?"

"I suppose so," she reluctantly concurred. "I just don't like the fact that you're using my daughter as bait."

Before Michael could respond, the telephone rang. Rebekah took the liberty of answering it. "Helms residence," There was a slight pause until she said, "One moment please." She placed a palm over the mouthpiece and eyed Dawn. "It's for you, though you may want to use the phone in the study. This line is a little fuzzy."

Ignoring the confused looks she received from her parents, Dawn rose to her feet, instantly knowing who was on the line. "Thanks, Aunt Rebekah," she replied. "I won't be long." She exited the family room and hurried to the study. As soon as she picked up the cordless phone, her aunt hung up on the other end.

"Hello, Mark," she cordially greeted, glad that he cared enough about her to call.

"Hello, Dawn," he said, his tone sounding rather distant. "How are you doing?"

She sat down at her uncle's desk. "I'm all right, I guess. Thanks for asking."

"Nathaniel told me that your parents are visiting."

"Yeah," she confirmed. "Michael invited them here."

"Well, that being the case, then I'm going to cancel our date for tomorrow," he coolly stated.

The teenager's heart dropped. "What?" she gasped. "No, please don't do that, Mark. Please. I need you so bad right now."

"Dawn, listen to me," he commanded. "I am not interested in meeting your parents, and I am definitely not going to fuck you with them around."

"Then I'll sneak out," she desperately told him.

"And risk Michael's wrath?" he asked. "I don't think so."

"Markâ€" "

"I'm sorry, Dawn, but I have to go. I'll call you again once your parents leave, all right?"

"Okay," she relented. "Bye, Mark."

"Good-bye, Dawn."

The finality in Mark's tone brought tears to the teenager's eyes. Was their relationship over already? She supposed she could understand why he wouldn't want to meet her parents, but ending their relationship now just made her feel used. She had given him her virginity and let him fuck her with the idea that they would be together for at least a few months. How could she have been so naïve?

Dawn set the receiver down and wrapped her arms around her body, her tears now becoming hard sobs. How could she face Michael or Karen knowing that they both had been right about Mark? She regretted giving him her virginity, just as Karen had warned. The brunette hadn't been speaking out of malice but with genuine concern. Dawn felt like such a fool.

Then, without giving it a second thought, she ran out of her uncle's study and to the foyer. After yanking her jacket from the coat rack, she dashed outside. The teenager wasn't sure how long it would take for Michael to sense she was gone, so she ran pell-mell from the mansion without any particular destination in mind. Running just felt so goodâ€"freeing almost.

Hyped on adrenaline and desperately wanting to be alone, Dawn opened the front gate and fled into the woods across the street. A small voice inside her head told her it was ludicrous to run from the man who had vowed to protect her, but the teenager kept her steady pace until a painful stitch in her side finally made her stop for a short break.

Breathing hard, the teenager sat down on a log. She listened carefully for any sound that would imply that she was being followed. However, all she heard was bird songs and the occasional rap of a woodpecker as it hunted for insects in a nearby tree. She looked up searching for the bird when someone roughly grabbed a hold of her

hair from behind and painfully pulled her backwards onto the ground. As she began releasing a scream for help, another hand tightly clamped down over her mouth. She instantly felt something small slide down her throat. Then, a man's face filled her vision as he moved to straddle her.

The blonde girl fought with all her might to break free from her attacker, but his earth-brown eyes simply stared down at her coldly while she continued to struggle against him. He didn't say anything to her. He just watched as though he was waiting for something to happen.

Dawn knew she had been drugged, and it didn't take long before she started feeling the effects of it. As her mind and body surrendered to the drug, she became acutely aware of the man's erection pressing down on her belly. She slowly moved her hand to that spot, touching him through his jeans. He lowered his gaze, a hint of a smirk on his lips as he unzipped his fly, allowing her full access to him. All reasonable thought left Dawn's mind while she rubbed her hand up and down his length. This act of intimacy didn't feel wrong to her at all. On the contrary, she found herself actually enjoying it.

After a few minutes, the sandy-haired man gripped her hair tighter and scooted up her body until his manhood was even with her mouth. She willingly opened her lips wide for him. Scoffing, he steadily pumped in and out of her mouth. Dawn had never tasted a man before, and the experience made her panties uncomfortably wet. Yet, instead of indulging her needs, he simply pushed his manhood back into his pants and stood up. Then, even in her delirious state of mind, he did something that provoked a sense of fear within her.

Still observing her, the man picked up a thick tree branch and brandished a large pocket knife. Once he had carved the tip of the branch into a sharp point, he waved it at her. "Now let's talk about my brother, shall we?"

"Yes, let's," answered a female voice, familiar to Dawn's ears, "but first I want you to move away from my friend, you sick fuck."

The blonde girl gazed passed the man to where Karen was standing. The former had never seen the latter look so angry before. The brunette's eyes were filled with rage and had turned just as black as Michael's.

The man instantly spun around. "You know what happened to him?" he asked, studying Karen hard.

"Yes," she answered, though Dawn was finding it extremely hard to focus on what was being said. Not only was her body still craving sexual release but she was also beginning to feel very groggy. The fatigue, though, quickly overpowered her arousal and within seconds, she fell sound asleep.

* * *

><p>Timothy inwardly groaned when the blonde teenager lost consciousness. Although it was the brunette who held the answers to his brother's mysterious disappearance, it didn't extinguish his desire to fuck Blondie. However, he would forgo his plan of torturing her with the tree branch and use it on her friend instead. But first,

he had to subdue the brunette without the help of drugs, for he wanted her to be fully aware of her pain and torment. In his eyes, she deserved a horrific demise. "So what did you do to my brother? Kill him?"<p>

The brunette shook her head. "No, I didn't kill him," she replied.

"But he is dead," Timothy stated, knowing he spoke the truth.

The girl nodded. "Yes. He hit on me, and my boyfriend took offense to it."

Timothy scrutinized her for a long moment, his brown eyes slowly widening. "You're David Miller's daughter," he said.

"Yes," the brunette answered, not even bothering to lie.

"Well, if you think that's going to save you, it's not," Timothy promised. "I don't need your father's money any more. I'm doing well enough on my own now."

The girl's eyes narrowed. "You sicken me," she spat. "Men like you and your brother deserve to die."

Timothy instantly threw himself at the girl and wrestled her to the ground. He then sunk the blade of his pocket knife deep into her side. He muffled her screams with his hand. She continued to scream as he turned the blade sideways, ripping her flesh, causing even more damage.

By the time he finally withdrew his knife and closed it, the brunette was laying lifeless beneath him, hardly breathing. With her successfully subdued, Timothy carelessly tossed the knife aside and crawled over to the blonde girl, his need for her becoming unbearable. He quickly unbuttoned her jeans and was about to bare her womanhood when a dark shadow fell over them. He craned his head back, his eyes widening in shock.

The sheriff's daughter was standing behind him, clutching the carved tree branch securely in her hand. Without a word, she plunged the pointed end of the long stick right through Timothy's chest. The word 'impossible' gurgled from his mouth just before his heart burst underneath the pressure, putting an end to his life.

* * *

><p>Once the light left the man's expression, Karen yanked the branch from his body only to drive it back in, this time pinning the corpse to the ground next to Dawn. The brunette's side hurt like hell, and the stab wound was still dripping blood. However, her mission wasn't completeâ€”not yet.<p>

She was confident that Michael would find Dawn, so Karen continued her journey on foot, relying on pure instinct to guide her footsteps to her destination. When she finally reached the lone farmhouse, she was breathing hard and was beginning to feel weak from blood loss, though her wound was no longer bleeding. She knew her body needed sleep in order to continue the healing process, yet the teenager forced herself to stay awake. This matter could not wait.

She painfully trudged up the front steps and rang the doorbell. A slender man with graying hair answered the door. His features were etched with a fatigue that could only be explained with losing a loved one. "Mr. Davis?" she breathlessly inquired. At his curt nod, she continued. "I know this is a bad time for you, but I really need to speak with you and your wife, if she's available."

The man gave Karen a once over, his blue-green eyes widening when they landed on her torn and bloodied sweater. "Good lord!" he exclaimed. "Are you hurt?"

The brunette nodded, tears of sorrow and guilt now stinging her eyes. "Yes, but it's imperative that I speak to you. Please."

Mr. Davis took pity on her and led her into his home. "Do you want me to call an ambulance?" he asked as he helped her into a chair.

"No," Karen firmly answered. "I'll be all right."

Mrs. Davis then came out of the kitchen, her expression laden with grief. "Bill, what's going on?"

"Jess, this isâ€" The man abruptly stopped speaking and said, "Well, actually I don't know who this is. Are you a friend of Bonnie's?"

The teenager shook her head. "No, I never knew your daughter," she answered. "My name is Karen Miller, and I'm the reason why Bonnie is dead."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Davis stared at her in shocked silence. "I hope you can explain yourself," the light-haired woman said at last.

"I'll do my best," Karen promised while the two adults sat down on a sofa. "It all began when I was eight..."

* * *

><p>Jessica Davis intently listened to Karen Miller's life story, her heart going out to the teenager. "So, Bonnie's murderer is dead?" the woman quietly asked once the brunette had stopped speaking.<p>

"Yes."

William shifted slightly. "I still don't understand how you think her death is your fault."

"Don't you see?" Karen miserably asked, on the verge of crying. "The man had come to Waukegan because of me, and now your daughter is dead." Tears began to trickle down her cheeks. "I'm so, so sorry. I never meant for Bonnie to die."

Jessica immediately rose to her feet and tightly embraced the weeping girl. "Of course you didn't, and Bill and I certainly don't blame you for her death." The woman pulled back a little and grasped Karen's hands. "Now, come. You're hurt and exhausted, and you need to rest."

"Thank you for your hospitality," the younger said, "but I can't stay. Michael will be looking for me."

"Listen to my wife, Karen," commanded William. "You're in no condition to leave. I'm sure if your fianc  was here, he'd agree."

Jessica nodded. "And if he comes here looking for you, we'll explain what happened, all right?"

"All right," Karen conceded, "but I doubt he'll be in the mood to listen. I'm sure he's going to be furious with me for leaving without him."

"We'll take that risk," William said. "Now, go."

Jessica helped Karen from the chair and guided her to the guest room. "Here, let's get you out of these clothes. I have an extra nightshirt you can wear." The woman opened a dresser drawer and pulled out a red flannel shirt. Then, she helped the teenager undress, gasping when she saw the wide deep gash in Karen's side. "Good heavens! Doesn't that hurt?"

"Yes," the brunette confessed. "A lot, actually, but I'm hoping it will feel better once I get some sleep."

Jessica nodded, now understanding that Karen was truly different from them. A normal human being would have most certainly died after receiving an injury like that, especially without immediate medical attention. "Do you at least want me to wash it out for you? I'd hate for it to get infected."

"Yes, you probably should," agreed Karen.

"All right. Lay down on the bed, then. I'll be back in a few minutes."

While Jessica was in the bathroom gathering up some medical supplies, a hard knock sounded on the front door. A moment later she heard William say, "Ah, you must be Michael. We've been expecting you."

Jessica immediately stepped out of the bathroom. The tall man deliberately turned his black eyes onto her. "Hello, Michael," she greeted. "I'm Jessica, and that's my husband William. We're Bonnie Davis' parents."

Instant comprehension filled the killer's expression.

"Your fianc  told us everything," Jessica explained. "She's resting in the guest room right now."

Michael abruptly brushed passed her and strode directly to the guest room's door. Jessica cautiously followed him. "Michael, Karen was stabbed," she informed him, her tone quiet.

He looked at her and gave his head a curt nod. He knew.

Jessica stood back as the killer slowly opened the door. He stood in the threshold for a long moment, simply staring into the large

room.

Curious, Jessica peered around the door jamb. Karen was lying on top of the coverlet, sound asleep. "I was just about to clean her wound," the woman murmured, "but you're welcome to do it, if you want."

Michael nodded, his dark eyes never wavering from his fiancée.

"She guessed you'd be angry with her, but we didn't feel comfortable letting her leave in her condition." When the killer failed to respond, Jessica said, "You're both welcome to stay here as long as necessary, but just to warn you, we've been hounded by the police and news reporters all day today, and I'm sure they'll be back again tomorrow."

That got Michael's attention.

"Don't worry. We won't breathe a word about this to anyone. Karen did what she felt obligated to do. We can't fault her for that—and neither should you," she courageously added.

Michael merely returned his eyes to the unconscious teenager.

Sighing, Jessica said, "I'll bring you everything you'll need to clean the wound. I'll be right back."

* * *

><p>When the woman left, Michael slowly approached the bed, regarding his soulmate with a new-found respect. Her eyelids remained closed, but he suspected she could still hear him. "I know I should be angry with you for going after Dawn alone, but I'm not," he confided. "You proved your mettle today, Karen, and I'm damn proud of you."<p>

He fell mute when he heard footsteps approaching the opened door. Mrs. Davis entered the room. She set a bowl of soapy water down on the nightstand, along with a sponge; a large first aid kit; and a bottle of aspirin.

"There," she said. "Is there anything else you need?"

The killer shook his head.

"All right. Well, my husband and I are going to bed. If you decide to leave before sunrise, could you please just lock the door on your way out?"

He offered her a single nod.

"Thank you."

Michael waited for the door to close before tending to his lover. He unbuttoned the flannel nightshirt, his eyes widening at the sight of her injury. "That son of a bitch," he hissed, though his anger quickly turned into admiration.

Even after she had been stabbed, she had possessed the strength to skewer her attacker—twice; hiked all the way to the Davis house;

and still had enough energy to explain to them why their daughter had been killed. "You're absolutely amazing, Karen." Michael grabbed the bowl and sponge and then crouched down next to the bed. "I can't wait for you to become my wife."

The teenager didn't offer any response, so he assumed it was safe to start cleaning her wound. He dipped the sponge into the water. However, the moment the sponge touched the laceration she visibly flinched. "Karen, I know this hurts," he empathized, "but I need you to relax and stay as still as possible, all right?"

Much to the killer's gratification, she obeyed his wishes while he tended to her injury. He was relieved to see that the wound was already beginning to mend, though the edges were still very raw. "You're healing well, sweetness," he assured her, "but I think we'll stay here for a few more hours. I'd rather not move you right now."

Michael opened the first aid kit and took out a tube of antibiotic ointment, a spool of gauze, medical tape, and scissors. After dressing the deep cut, he buttoned up his fiancée's shirt. Then, he simply let her sleep.

* * *

><p>Karen woke up to darkness. She had no idea what time it was, but judging from the lack of light in the room, she knew the sun had yet to rise. Despite the darkness, she was still able to see her lover's form sitting in a chair across the room. "Michael, are you awake?" she asked, keeping her voice low.<p>

"Yes."

"I'm ready to leave now. Will you help me?"

"Of course," he said, rising from the chair. He picked up her clothes from their spot on the floor and then reached for her hand.

With Michael's assistance, Karen sat up, wincing slightly at the discomfort.

He tilted his head at her. "Are you sure you're up to this?"

"Yes," she firmly answered.

He merely nodded and set her garments down on the bed.

The teenager quickly donned her pants but inwardly cringed as she held up her bloodied sweater. "Do you think the Davises will mind if I keep their shirt?" she questioned.

Michael smirked at her. "No, just don't leave your sweater here."

Karen folded the soiled garment and said, "Would you mind carrying it."

He shook his head, tucking the sweater underneath his arm as he helped her with her shoes.

"Thanks," she said, "for everything."

Michael leaned forward and placed a light kiss on her lips. "My pleasure, sweetness. Now, let's get out of here."

Nodding, Karen gingerly stood up. She followed her partner out of the room, pausing for a moment at the sound of a woman weeping.

"Karen, there's nothing more you can do for her," the killer sternly said. "You've given them closure. How they decide to cope with their loss is now completely up to them."

Knowing he was right, the teenager continued walking to the front door. Michael held it open for her and then locked it securely behind them. Together, they descended the steps and headed towards the green Buick parked near the barn.

"I'm glad you drove here," Karen commented.

Michael gave her a sideways glance. "I'm sure you are."

The couple entered the car. As soon as Michael revved up the engine, Karen leaned back in her seat and drew out a cleansing breath.

He looked over at her, his expression serious. "You've been through a lot today, sweetness," he stated. "Are you feeling all right?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"So no regrets?"

"No, none," she truthfully replied.

The killer returned his eyes to the dark country road. "Good."

Karen straightened and said, "Michael, you know I didn't kill that man purely in self-defense. I wanted him dead for reasons that went far beyond him stabbing me."

Her companion met her gaze. "Karen, you had every right to kill that man, self-defense or not. No one is going to deny you that."

"But you still didn't want me going after him."

Michael audibly sighed. "Karen, killing someone, no matter the reasons behind it, can still be very damaging," he said, looking out the windshield. "I wasn't sure if you were ready, truly ready, to take a life. Today you proved that you are, given the right circumstances. However, I still don't believe you'd be able to kill a person in cold blood."

"No, I don't think so either," Karen agreed.

"And, truth be told, I wouldn't want you to."

Karen's eyes lingered on Michael for a long moment, a soft smile touching her lips. "Thanks, Michael; that means a lot to me."

They rode the rest of the way to the mansion in amicable silence. When Michael finally killed the engine, he turned to Karen. "So, are

you ready to go in?"

She gave her head a sound nod. "Yes."

He led the way inside the large house. The teenager had assumed that everyone would be in bed, but the moment she stepped into the foyer, pandemonium broke loose. Michael immediately backed away from her, refusing to be a part of the commotion.

"Oh my god, you're alive!" Johanna yelled, running up to Karen. "We were worried sick about you!"

"Derek said he and Michael found a knife covered in your blood," Rebekah added, "but that you were missing."

"Where the hell were you?" Nathaniel asked.

"Didn't you ever think to call?" Rebekah countered.

"Hey!" Derek suddenly called out, silencing everybody. "Will you all let the poor girl breathe?" he commanded. He gave her a long look, which she returned. "I'm glad to see that you're still in one piece, kiddo."

"So am I," Karen answered. She really wanted to have a private conversation with the cop, but no one seemed very eager to leave the foyer. Finally, she said, "I'm going to get a drink."

"I'll go with you," said Derek.

Karen nodded, glancing over at Michael only to find that he was already gone.

No one dared follow her and the cop into the kitchen, which she was glad about. She grabbed a glass from the cupboard and filled it with refrigerated water. "How's Dawn?" she asked, sitting down at the table.

"Alive, thanks to you."

"Don't," she abruptly demanded.

"Don't what, Karen, thank you for saving my daughter's life?" he asked. "Kiddo, if it wasn't for you, Dawn would be dead, and Johanna and I would be in the same position as the Davises."

Karen sipped her water. "That's where I went after I killed my father's associate," she said. "I told them everything."

The cop studied her hard. "You felt responsible for Bonnie's death."

"Yes," she admitted. "I felt responsible for bringing her killer here."

Derek instantly shook his head. "Karen, Bonnie's death isn't your fault."

"I know." She finished her drink and sighed. "Michael once told me that I can't blame myself for the decisions others ultimately

make."

"That's wise advice, kiddo."

"Yeah," she muttered.

Derek offered her an encouraging smile. "He loves you, Karenâ€"very deeply."

The teenager tenderly touched her side. "I know. I love him very deeply, too. He is my true soulmate."

The cop sat forward in his chair and said, "Karen, if you'll let me, I'd be honored to give you away at your wedding."

Tears instantly sprung to her eyes, but she held them at bay. "I would love that, Mr. Johnson."

"Derek," he corrected. "We don't need formalities between us, not anymore."

The brunette wordlessly nodded, too moved to say anything.

"Well, kiddo, I think I'm going to call it a night," Derek said, standing up.

Karen followed suit. "Yeah, so am I. Thanks for the talk, though."

He walked over and briefly hugged her. "Anytime."

By the time they left the kitchen, the mansion was quiet, much to Karen's relief. Derek kept her company as they ascended the grand staircase. When they reached the second door on the right, he bade her goodnight and disappeared into his room.

The teenager leisurely strode down the dimly lit hallway and quietly entered her quarters. Michael was lying in bed. His eyes were closed, but they snapped open the second she closed the door.

"I'll join you in a few minutes," she said.

He simply nodded, watching as she slipped into the bathroom.

Once she completed her bedtime routine, Karen returned to the bedroom. She tossed her jeans in the hamper and set her car key on the bureau. Then, she crawled into bed only to discover that her partner was naked under the blankets. "Michael, we can't make love tonight," she told him. "I didn't take my pill yesterday."

"Yes, I know," he said, "but you're not ovulating, yet, so we're safeâ€"unless you're too sore?"

Karen shook her head. "No."

"Good," he replied, "because I want nothing more than to be inside of you."

"I want that, too," she confessed.

The killer rose above the teenager and shoved her panties to the side, not even bothering to undress her. He pushed his manhood against her, both of them moaning softly as he sank down deep into her moist folds. "I love you, Karen," he muttered into her hair. "I know I keep telling you that, but it's the damn truth."

"Michael," she said, hugging him close, "I'll never grow tired of hearing those words from you. Promise me you'll never stop saying them."

He moved his face down so that it was even with hers and stared intensely into her eyes. "I promise."

Michael made passionate love to her, then. Afterwards, Karen fell sound asleep entangled in his arms with a hint of a contented smile still touching her lips.

36. October 4, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****October 4, 1997****

A soft knock on her bedroom door is what finally got Dawn out of bed. She really didn't feel like facing the world, yet, but it was obvious she could no longer fight the inevitable. She slipped into a light blue robe, attempting to make herself look decent for her unknown visitor. "Come in," she said, tying the sash around her waist. The door opened and in stepped Karen clothed in jeans and a white blouse.

"Oh, hi," Dawn greeted.

"Hey," the brunette said. "I won't stay long. I just wanted to see how you were doing."

Dawn shrugged. "I'm doing okay, I guess."

Karen tilted her head and asked, "Do you remember anything that happened after you were drugged?"

The blonde girl shook her head, refusing to speak about her hazy memories of the man. "No."

"Dawn, I know it's hard to talk about it," Karen empathized, "but it's just me here, and nothing you say will leave this room. I promise."

Dawn looked at her best friend and then sat back down on her bed. "Did you see what the man did to me?"

Karen gave her head a negative shake. "No. All I know is that I stopped him from raping you€"and anyone else for that matter."

Dawn's eyes widened. "Are you saying that you're the one who killed him?" she gasped.

"Yes, and don't think for one second that I regret it, because I don't," Karen firmly stated. "Both he and his brother got what they deserved."

"His brother?" Dawn questioned, confused.

The brunette nodded. "Your assaulter was the twin brother of the man who Michael killed back in August," she explained. "I recognized him right away."

"Oh," was all Dawn could think of to say. She stared at her best friend, now seeing her in a whole new light.

"Dawn, I did what I had to do," Karen flatly told her.

"It's not that," she answered.

"What is it, then?"

"Well, you were acting so despondent yesterday that it made me think you didn't care."

The moment those words passed Dawn's lips, Karen's countenance changed. The look of both shock and hurt that appeared in the brunette's expression was unmistakable. "You're like a sister to me, Dawn. If something happened to you, I don't know what I'd do."

Dawn shifted uncomfortably and said, "But you have Michael now, and you've been spending so much time with him lately that I was beginning to feel replaced."

Karen sighed softly. "Michael could never replace you, Dawn. The last few days have just been so overwhelming for me, and he's the only one who can channel my stress so that it won't consume me."

The blonde teenager snickered. "Through sex?" she guessed.

"Yes, but it's so much more than that between us. It's difficult to describe." Karen pursed her lips together, simply gazing at Dawn. Finally, she said, "Sex with my father never felt like sex with Michael. If Michael had made love to me before my father had, I never would have mistaken my father for Michael. However, at the time, I had nothing to compare it to, and under the influence of the drug, I saw only Michael. In my heart that's who I wanted it to be, but, even then, I thought I was only dreaming of him."

"That's exactly how it felt with my assaulter, too," Dawn proclaimed, "and the worst part is I actually enjoyed it."

"I know," Karen uttered. "That's what angers me the most—the fact that I couldn't wait for my own father to fuck me. God, I hate him."

Dawn slowly nodded. "I get it now," she said. "I don't know why it didn't click with me before. I mean I knew had been sexually abused by your dad, but I really didn't understand your position until now. I'm sorry, truly sorry, for what you went through."

"My father is a sick man, who aligns himself with sick people," Karen

stated. "I'm sorry you had to experience it for yourself, but at least now you know what we're dealing with here."

"I do," Dawn confirmed, "and I promise never to run off again."

Karen took a seat on a chair and said, "What I want to know is why you ran off in the first place when you knew there was a man out there who wanted to rape and kill you. What the hell did Markus say to you to make you _that_ upset?"

Dawn drew out a long breath. "He cancelled our date for today, because he didn't want to meet my parents."

Karen blinked. "That's it?" she asked incredulously. "_That's_ the reason why you left?"

Frowning, Dawn said, "No, I left because you were right about himâ€"because everything you said turned out to be true. He doesn't care about me at all."

"Just like I didn't?" the brunette countered. "I was so focused on my anger that you perceived my despondency as uncaring when in reality it was just the opposite. I care about you so much, Dawn, that the thought of someone raping and murdering you drove me to distraction. I wanted to find the man and kill him."

"Which is why you went after me."

"Yes."

"So you think Mark cares for me?" Dawn inquired.

Karen ran a hand through her hair. "I am not going to try to guess Markus' feelings at this point. We'll just have to see what happens once your parents leave." She then rose to her feet and began walking towards the door.

Dawn instantly noticed a slight limp in her friend's step. Concerned, the blonde girl asked, "Karen, did you get hurt yesterday?"

The brunette turned and calmly met the other's gaze. "The man stabbed me while I was trying to save you, Dawn."

"Wait, stabbed?!" she gasped. "Like with a knife?"

"Yes," Karen evenly replied, "but the pain's just a dull ache now, and Michael predicted that the cut will be completely healed by tomorrow. Unfortunately, my wounds still don't mend as quickly as his do."

Dawn promptly jumped to her feet and ran to Karen, dramatically throwing her arms around her best friend. "I'm sorry for ever believing that you didn't care. Will you please forgive me?"

"Dawn, it's all right. Really," Karen responded, returning the hug. "I'm just glad you're okay."

"I love you, Karen," the blonde teenager said. "I hope you know that."

"I love you, too, Dawn."

The girls separated, and the brunette left the bedroom without another word, giving Dawn time to get ready for the day.

* * *

><p>Michael greeted his fiancÃ© just outside Dawn's quarters. At her imploring look, he said, "Eleanor's downstairs, waiting to speak with Dawn and her family, so I think you and I should disappear for awhile and let them be."<p>

Karen nodded in agreement. "That sounds like a good idea to me, Michael, but where will we go?"

"Well, Eleanor suggested that I take you into Waukegan and treat you to lunch."

Karen's eyes immediately lit up. "Really," she breathed.

The killer nodded.

"Is that why you haven't changed back into your coveralls, yet?" she asked.

"That, and they still aren't completely dry," he answered.

Karen tilted her head at him. "Michael, you do know that the Helms have a laundry room, right?" she jested.

He suddenly reached behind her and pinched her rear.

"Hey!" she harshly scolded, rubbing the affected area. "That hurt."

"Yes, but I also know you enjoyed it," the killer countered. When Karen's cheeks flushed in admittance, he leaned in to kiss her. "I love you," he muttered against her lips.

"You are such an ass," she softly retorted.

He chortled, drawing her even closer to him. Within seconds they were outside, standing next to his car. He helped his lover into her seat and then walked around to his.

Once he started driving, he asked, "So, how's Dawn?"

Karen shrugged. "She said she's okay, but guilt is starting to set in now. Still, it could have been so much worse."

Michael nodded in agreement. "Did you happen to find out what the phone call was about?"

"Yes. Apparently, Markus didn't want to meet Dawn's parents, so he cancelled their date for today. She assumed that meant I was right about him, and it really upset her."

"Clearly," Michael said. He stole a glance at his fiancÃ© whose brow was creased with worry.

"Dawn's been acting so impulsively lately," she added.

He sighed. "It's her age, Karen. She's acting like a typical teenager, who has also been under a lot of stress."

"And I haven't exactly been the best friend to her either over the last few days," his lover openly confessed.

The killer patted her knee. "Don't be too hard on yourself, sweetness. Your body was preparing itself for possible harm. That's why we've been so drawn to each other during this past week."

She suddenly looked at him, her expression inquisitive.

"No, Karen, that's not how it works," he replied, answering her unasked question. "Your physiological makeup is unique from any other female out there, and it makes you receptive to what my seed has to offer. Even if Dawn and I had sex, her body is physically incapable of utilizing my seed the way your body can. Does that make sense to you?"

The teenager nodded. "That's why sex with you feels so different than it did with my father."

"Yes," Michael firmly verified.

"Which means I was born specifically to be your soulmate," she concluded. "He just got in the way."

The killer drew out a long breath, pleased that his fianc  finally understood what he had known all along. "Yes, Karen, that's exactly right," he said. "Your father sensed that you were different and selfishly tried to claim you for himself."

"But in his mind, I do belong to him," she stated.

"Therein lies the problem, sweetness. He will never be able to accept the fact that you were born to him, not for him."

"I know," she softly replied.

"Speaking of sex," Michael said, purposely altering the conversation away from Karen's father, "I have a proposition for you, one of which you may or may not like."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Oh, and what might that be?" she asked.

"Well, because our relationship has been so focused on the physical side as of late, I was thinking you and I could practice celibacy until our wedding night."

Karen instantly sniggered. "Are you serious? Us?"

The killer stoically nodded.

"Michael, we haven't gone one day, yet, without sex."

"It won't be easy," he concurred, "but I truly believe abstaining

from sex for a short time will bring us closer together in the long run."

Karen looked at him. "Does that mean you'd move out of our room?"

"It would only be a temporary arrangement, sweetness," Michael assured her, "and I would be staying in the bedroom right across the hall."

"It sounds like you've already discussed this with someone," she retorted.

"Just with Eleanor," he said, "and she agreed that living apart right now would be beneficial for yours and mine relationship."

"I'm not against it, Michael," Karen stated, "but if we're going to do this, then we definitely need to set some boundaries."

He nodded. "Considering the strength of our physical attraction, I don't think we should go beyond hand holding."

"That's a rather strict boundary," his fiancée complained.

"Yes, but think of it this way, Karen; the next kiss we share will be the one binding us together as husband and wife."

"That's not fair, Michael," she lightly chided. "You're exploiting another one of my weaknesses."

He offered her a small grin as he pulled into a parking lot behind a local bar and grill. "It's not my fault that you're a hopeless romantic, sweetness."

She sighed and shook her head in exasperation. "You know, my former sentiment about you still stands."

"Good," he firmly answered while parking his car. When she caught his gaze, he said, "It's an accurate assessment, Karen."

"Yeah, tell me about it."

The couple stared at each other for a long moment. Finally, Michael opened his door and stepped out of the Buick. Karen quickly followed suit. When they met up at the rear of the car, he instinctively reached for her hand. Together, they walked towards the restaurant's front doors.

"Are you sure you're comfortable with doing this?" Karen softly asked as Michael grabbed the wooden door handle.

He bowed his head and grazed his lips against her temple. "It will be fine, sweetness."

She simply nodded, striding passed him. The greeter, a college-age male, instantly gave her a warm smile.

"Welcome to Big Ed's Bar and Grill," he said. "Will it be just the two of you today?"

"Yes, thank you," Karen responded.

He picked up two menus and then led the couple to a secluded booth in the back. "Courtney will be your server this afternoon. She'll be right with you."

"Thank you," Karen said. When the young man left, her eyes strayed to a television overhead that was playing a football game.

Michael followed her gaze and asked, "Are you a fan?"

She shrugged. "Sort of. Derek is a big Hoosier's fan, being from Indiana and all."

"It doesn't appear that they are doing too well," Michael noted, reading the Indiana/Michigan score.

A hint of a smile played on his partner's lips. "No, they're not."

He studied her as she continued to watch the game. "Am I missing something?"

Karen turned her attention onto him. "My mom grew up in a foster home in Ann Arbor where she was introduced to Michigan football. She once told me that watching the games was a way for her to connect with her foster family, and she quickly fell in love with it. When I was little, she and I would often watch games together while my father was at work. It was our special time to bond with each other." Karen's gaze dropped down to her menu just as their waitress approached them. Michael's eyes, though, lingered on his lover. That was the most she had ever spoken about her relationship with her mother. He was glad that she was finally opening up and sharing fond memories of her childhood with him.

"Hi, my name is Courtney," the young woman stated, addressing the couple. "May I start you off with beverages and an appetizer, perhaps?"

Karen glanced up from the menu. Michael remained silent, and she took that as a cue to order for him. "We would both like an iced tea, please," she said, "and an order of mozzarella sticks."

"Very good," the waitress replied. "I'll be right back with your beverages."

"Thank you."

Once the young woman scurried off, Michael asked, "So, what happened to your mother's parents?"

"Nothing happened to them as far as I know. One day they simply moved out of their house and left their three kids behind. My mom never talked about it much, but she wanted to make sure that I would never feel neglected by her, which is why I have such a hard time believing she would just up and leave without saying good-bye to me."

The killer mutely nodded, letting the subject drop for the time being.

Courtney returned with their drinks and set them on the table. "You're appetizers will be ready in a few minutes. Do you two know what you want to order, yet?"

"Yes, I think so," Karen answered. "I would like a full rack of ribs with a baked potato, and my fianc  would like a twelve ounce Filet Mignon rare also with a baked potato."

"Rare?" the waitress repeated.

"Yes."

"All right, I'll put this in for you," Courtney said, taking the menus.

"Thanks." Karen took a sip of her iced tea, her eyes never leaving Michael's.

"What is it, sweetness?" he inquired.

She lowered her glass, a blush creeping into her cheeks. "Do you want kids someday?"

He blinked, caught off-guard by her question.

"I'm sorry," the teenager hastily apologized. "I shouldn't have asked."

"Karen, you of all people have the right to ask such a question," Michael told her, "and to answer it, yes, I would at least like to conceive one child with you."

"So would I," she confessed, "but would he or she be like us?"

"I would assume so, sweetness, which is why I'm uncertain about having more than one." His eyes suddenly narrowed when her expression remained pensive. "Karen, please tell me you're not considering going off the Pill," he said.

"No!" she gasped. "Absolutely not! I was just asking for curiosity's sake."

The killer exhaled a sigh of relief. "Good, because I don't think now would be the best time for you to get pregnant."

"Definitely not," his soulmate agreed.

Courtney brought them their appetizer, inadvertently interrupting their conversation. "Careful, they're really hot," she said while putting the plate of mozzarella sticks between their place settings.

Just then, a small group of high school students walked into the restaurant. Courtney glowered at her coworker as he led them into her section. He met her stare and shrugged apologetically. Still scowling, she left to take care of them.

"I feel for her; I really do," Michael emphasized.

Karen reached for a mozzarella stick and dipped it into the cup of

marinara sauce. "You really dislike teenagers, don't you?"

"I loathe them," he corrected.

"And yet Dawn and I are both teenagers," Karen evenly noted. "Ironical, huh?"

"Very," he concurred.

Karen fell quiet as she continued to eat.

After studying her for a few minutes, Michael got the distinct impression that she was eavesdropping on the group's conversation. He heard the students talking about upcoming SATs, prom, and college applications. He suddenly realized that his lover would have been partaking in the same experiences had she been able to stay in high school. "Karen?"

She looked at him expectantly.

"I'm sorry," he sincerely apologized.

She shrugged and said, "It's fine, Michael."

"No, it's not fine," he disputed. "You had goals and aspirations set for yourself that despite everything you've held on to, and you cannot keep ignoring their existence. Whether you like it or not, they're a part of who you are."

Michael let his partner mull over his words as Courtney served them their meals. After the waitress left, he asked, "What do you want out of life, Karen?"

She held his gaze, her dark eyes searching his. Finally, she said. "I want to finish high school and go to college. I also want to be a mom and live happily ever after with you."

He nodded, understanding that it was now his responsibility to make those dreams come true for his future wife. "All right, sweetness. I can't give you an exact time frame, but I promise you will achieve all of your goals."

She gaped at him. "Even college?"

"Yes, of course," the killer affirmed. "Unlike your father, I have no reason to hinder you from furthering your education."

Karen instantly graced him with a broad smile. "You're wonderful, Michael."

He scoffed in response. "I think I like your previous assessment of me better."

"Fine," the teenager relented. "You're a wonderful ass."

Michael felt the corners of his mouth lift, despite his best efforts to keep a straight face. "Sweetness, let's just eat before our food gets cold."

Still grinning, Karen picked up her fork and obediently followed his

command.

Michael merely shook his head, hoping that all the days leading up to their wedding would be just like this one.

37. October 4, 1997: Part 2

After their lunch date, Karen and Michael decided to explore some of the other sites that Waukegan had to offer. They were currently strolling along the marina, acting just like any normal couple out on a date. However, although it felt good to get away from the mansion and Dawn's relatives for awhile, the events of the last couple of days were still plaguing the teenager's mind. "I want it stopped," she stated at last.

Michael tilted his head, his expression inquisitive. "What stopped?"

"The threat on Dawn's life. I want it to endâ€"now. Do you have a quarter?"

The killer reached into his pocket and pulled out his change from lunch. He singled out a quarter and promptly dropped it into Karen's cupped palm. "Do you want me to come with you?" he asked.

She firmly shook her head. "No. This is going to be hard enough without you standing beside me. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Michael kissed her temple and said, "I'll be right here."

Karen nodded. Then, she strode to the nearest payphone while Michael sat down on a park bench. She turned her gaze from him to the phone's silver keypad and resolutely dialed her father's private work number.

****Haddonfield, Illinois****

David strode into his private office where Jerry was waiting for him. The sheriff shut the door hard, his dark eyes burning with fury. "Timothy is a fuckin' idiot," he lowly growled. "Why the hell didn't he just kill Dawn and be done with it?" The cop pounded the top of his oak desk with his fist. "Dammit! I thought Timothy had more brains than his brother. Apparently, I was wrong."

"It's going to be damn near impossible to get to her now," Jerry said, "but maybe this will be enough to lure Karen out of hiding."

"Even if it does, who's going to know?" the sheriff irately replied. "I can't risk sending anyone else up to Waukegan right now, and there's no way I can go without raising suspicions. Despite Dawn's unwavering loyalty to Karen, both Derek and Johanna still believe my side of the story, and I want it to stay that way."

The bouncer looked skeptical. "If they believe you, then why'd they leave Haddonfield?"

David casually shrugged. "Dawn probably got scared and called them."

She's still their daughter, Jerry. I wouldn't expect them to completely abandon her."

"Yet you still trust them."

"They haven't given me a reason not to at this point."

Jerry simply nodded.

The phone on David's desk suddenly rang. As he reached over to answer it, he casually eyed the photograph of his daughter that sat in a gold frame next to the phone. "Sheriff Miller," he professionally announced.

"Hello, Dad."

David's eyes widened in absolute shock. "Karen?" he breathed.

Jerry's mouth fell open, his eyes also wide.

"Yeah, Dad, it's me," she said.

"Well I'll be damned," the cop muttered. More loudly, he asked, "What can I do for you?"

"I heard about the murder in Waukegan," Karen bluntly replied, "and I know it was meant as a warning for Dawn. I never wanted innocent people to die on my account, which is why I'm calling you. I need you to tell your _associates_ to back off."

David scoffed. "And what incentive do I have to do that?"

"If you do as I ask, then I will return to you and give you the family you want," Karen said. "But, if anything, and I mean _anything_, happens to Dawn, then you can forget that you ever had a daughter. Got it?"

"All right, princess, but I have a counter stipulation for you," David declared. "I want you to be a willing participant in this. There will be no more drugs and deception. I want complete acceptance on your part. Otherwise, Dawn _will_ be hurt. Do you understand?"

There was a pregnant pause, but then Karen finally spoke. "In that case, I'm going to need some time before I return to you."

"Why?" David asked. "Are you still with your lover?"

She sighed. "No. He broke up with me after I told him about youâ€"but I can't stop thinking about him or about the times that we shared. Despite everything, I still love him, Dad."

Upon hearing his daughter's confession, the cop closed his eyes for a long moment and then reopened them. "Now you know what I've been going through," he told her. "I love you, Karenâ€"so much. All I want is for us to be together."

"I know," came her soft reply, "but I'm just not to that point of acceptance, yet. If you want me willing, then you'll have to give me

more time. Please."

David drew out a heavy breath. "How much more time?"

"I don't know," Karen answered, "but I promise it will be before next Christmas. I just don't want to rush this. You're asking a lot of me."

His eyes narrowed. "But you will comply?"

"Yes. You were right, Dad," Karen admitted. "No one besides Dawn believes me, not even her parents. I have no one besides you and her."

"Well, I promise to leave her alone as long as you keep your end of our bargain," the cop stated. "However, if you're not home by next Christmas, then I'll make sure she meets a slow torturous end."

"Don't worry, Dad. I promise that won't be necessary."

"Karen, it might be easier for you to accept this if you refer to me as David instead of Dad," he kindly suggested.

"I'll keep that in mind," she said. "Anything else?"

"Yes. The man who is after Dawn is Timothy McBride. Timothy also has an identical twin brother Alexander who may still be in Waukegan as well. I have no way to contact them, so Dawn might want to consider moving back to Haddonfield to guarantee her safety."

"Thank you. I'll let her know."

"Oh, and, Karen, I'd like to hear from you again before next year."

There was another pause on the line while she contemplated his request. "All right. I'll call again in a few weeks."

"I'm looking forward to it, princess. I love you."

"Good-bye, David."

Although Karen hadn't returned the cop's personal sentiment, the fact she had used his first name was a large victory in itself. Smiling smugly, he dropped his phone's receiver back onto its base and turned to his friend. "You were right, Jerry, though I hadn't expected her to actually call me."

The bouncer frowned. "So, Dawn is really off limits, huh?"

David shrugged. "For now, but once Karen comes home, I will extract my revenge. Trust me."

"And in the meantime?"

David's eyes drifted back down to Karen's photograph and said, "We wait."

****Waukegan, Illinois****

Karen hung up with her father, releasing a shaky breath. She was still trembling slightly as she sat down next to Michael, who instantly draped an arm around her shoulders, drawing her into his side. "It feels like I just made a pact with the devil himself," she told him, "but Dawn will be safeâ€"for awhile at least."

Michael remained quiet, his ebony orbs gazing out across the lake. Karen fell silent as well, for she now knew what returning to her father would entail. Her lover seemed to understand what it meant, too, his silence speaking for him.

"I wouldn't blame you if wanted to postpone the wedding," she voiced at last.

"No," he retorted, looking at her. "I'm not going to let this change anything. I love you, Karen, and I'm going to marry you as planned."

She raised herself up and kissed the very corner of his mouth. "I love you, too, Michael."

"Karen..." he warned.

"Sorry," she apologized. "It won't happen again."

Michael grunted in response and tightened his hold on her shoulders, pulling her even closer to him.

"My father gave me the names of his associates," Karen said, "and he recommended that Dawn return to Haddonfield since he can't ensure her safety here."

Michael scoffed. "I don't care what he says; she is not going back."

The teenager simply nodded.

"But at least now she can have some freedom," he said.

"Yes, but it makes me think I should have called my father sooner. I could have saved everyone a lot of trouble."

Michael glanced down at his lover. "No offense, Karen, but you weren't ready to make that phone call until now. What you went through yesterday changed you. It made you strongerâ€"much stronger."

"I know," she stated. "I can feel it. But, I'm still not ready to return to Haddonfield, especially not now."

"That makes two of us," Michael openly admitted. When she met his gaze, he brushed a strand of hair away from her eyes and said, "I can't bear the thought of him touching you, again."

"Then, let's not think about it," Karen firmly recommended. "I have over a year before I have to go back, and you and I have a wedding coming up that we have hardly discussed."

"You're right," the killer agreed, "though I have left most of the

planning in Eleanor's capable hands. I'm sure she will sit down with you soon to discuss the finer details such as food, décor, your dress, etcetera."

The younger smiled; she couldn't help it. The whole idea of actually being married to her soulmate made her giddy. "Oh, I was going to tell you, Derek asked to give me away."

Michael gave his head a subtle nod. "That doesn't surprise me, sweetness. Dawn's parents hold you in very high esteem, especially after yesterday."

"They're like a second family to me," she said. "When I wasn't at home or school, I was with them. They even risked my father's wrath by buying me a car and teaching me how to drive."

"Yes, they've treated you very well," her partner concurred.

Karen held his gaze, her dark orbs searching his. "I love them, Michael."

"I know."

She wordlessly nodded, hoping that would be enough to keep him from ever killing them.

Eventually, Michael dropped his arm from the teenager's shoulders and rose from the bench. "Come, Karen. It's time to go."

She followed his command without argument. They returned to his car in silence, which continued on their ride back to the mansion. Unable to take any more of the deafening quiet, she switched on the radio, earning a look of bemusement from her partner. "Do you mind?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No."

Karen turned the tuner, finally settling on a local station that was playing Foolish Games by Jewel. She absently started singing along with the lyrics while admiring the autumn scenery. Michael let her be, not seemingly bothered by the extra noise.

Eventually, Karen stopped singing, and her eyelids fell closed. It wasn't long before she drifted off into a sound sleep.

* * *

><p>Once they arrived at the mansion, Michael lifted Karen out of the car and transported them directly into her quarters. He tucked her into bed and placed a tender kiss on her forehead. When she didn't budge, he knew she was going to be out for the rest of the night.<p>

Michael left his lover's chamber and headed downstairs. Derek and Johanna were with Dawn in the sitting room, but Nathaniel, Rebekah, and Eleanor were nowhere to be seen. The killer entered the room and closed the door behind him. All eyes instantly turned to him. "I just thought you should know that Dawn's life is no longer in immediate danger," he said.

Johanna was the first to speak. "How did you manage that?"

"I didn't," Michael bluntly replied.

"Karen?"

He nodded. "She called her father."

Johanna's jaw dropped. "She didn't have to do that."

"Yes, she did," Michael corrected. "She needed to take control over the situation."

Derek frowned. "But at what cost?" he asked.

"That's between Karen and her father," the killer firmly replied, "though I'm sure you can pretty much guess what type of arrangement had to be made to appease him."

Johanna scowled at that. "Considering you two were always destined to be soulmates, I'm surprised you didn't somehow know about David," she curtly remarked.

Michael eyed her. "Even if I had, I couldn't have gotten involved at that time. She was just too damn young."

"Yes, but if you would have killed himâ€"

"Then she would have been orphaned," he interrupted, "and who knows what would have become of her after that. At least she has always had the assurance of her father's love, no matter its pervertedness."

Derek nodded. "As the old saying states, 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't know'."

"Exactly," the killer concurred. "And as horrible as her situation was, Karen rose above it and has become better for it."

"Perhaps so," Johanna said, "but I still think being around you is changing her."

"You give me far too much credit," Michael argued. "Karen is still her own person, as evident by her decision to go after her father's associate yesterday and calling her father today. She is very strong-willed."

"Which is why David felt the need to drug her, especially as she got older," Derek said.

Michael gave his head a sharp nod. "Yes."

He cast a glance in Dawn's direction, concerned because she hadn't spoken a word throughout the conversation, which was quite unusual for her. She was simply sitting in a chair, staring a hole into the ornate area rug at her feet. "Dawn...?"

She looked up, obviously surprised that he had addressed her.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded, though he could tell she wasn't being truthful with him, presumably because her parents were also observing her reaction to his inquiry.

"Where's Karen?" she asked.

"In bed," answered Michael. "She didn't get much sleep last night, and she's still recovering from the injury she received yesterday, but I promise you'll be able to see more of her tomorrow."

"Unless Dawn is able to come home with us," Johanna said.

"Absolutely not!" Derek harshly interjected before Michael could respond. "After everything David's done, there's no way in hell I'll ever trust him again."

Johanna looked disheartened, yet she didn't dispute Derek's sensible reasoning.

"It's okay, Mom," Dawn quickly assured her. "I don't mind staying here."

Johanna sighed. "It isn't that, sweetie." She turned her eyes back onto Michael. "The girls were supposed to graduate this year."

The killer nodded and said, "Since Sheriff Miller knows that Dawn is staying here, I am not opposed to you enrolling her in school, if you can still get her in."

"What about Karen?" Dawn asked.

Michael regretfully shook his head. "As much as she wants to finish high school, she can't until she turns eighteen."

"Don't worry, Dawn," Derek interjected. "When the time is right, she can get her GED."

"And go onto college," Michael added. "I have no intention of standing in the way of her dreams, Dawn."

She offered him a small smile, yet it failed to reach her eyes. "Good. I'm glad."

The killer knelt before the teenager and held her gaze. That act alone was enough to bring forth her tears. Johanna took a small step towards them, but Derek immediately reached for her elbow and wisely ushered her out of the room.

Once her parents left, Dawn spoke openly with Michael. "I'm s-so sorry," she wept. "To l-lose my h-head over a g-guy..."

"It was bound to happen sooner or later, Dawn," he comforted, "but I assume you haven't told your parents about him, yet."

She gave her head a solid shake. "If m-my father ever f-found out about M-Mark, he w-would kill m-me," she stuttered.

"I would be more concerned for Markus' well-being than your own,"

Michael said, distinctively recalling the two rounds Derek had fired into David's associate's skull just for 'safe measure'. "Legally, your father could arrest him for statutory rape, which I'm sure is why he is so wary about meeting him."

Dawn sniffled. "I k-know. I w-was just s-so upset about so m-much that I wasn't t-thinking straight."

Michael nodded in understanding as she reached for a tissue box that was sitting on an in-table. Once she dried her face, she said, "Sometimes I wish I was more like Karen. She rarely acts impulsively."

"Yes, she has a very disciplined mind, though, at times, it's almost too disciplined, in my honest opinion. She has a hard time conveying her feelings with me."

"With everyone," Dawn corrected. "She has always kept her feelings extremely guarded. I've only seen her cry once and that was when she came back after reuniting with you. She was really scared of going home and facing her father."

"For good reason," the killer stated, "but at least she knew that putting off the inevitable would only make her situation worse."

The blonde girl gave him a long look. "I think Sheriff Miller hurt her that night."

"That makes two of us, Dawn," Michael grimly said, rising to his feet. When she remained seated, he cocked his head at her. "Are you not going to bed?"

She shook her head. "I will in a little bit."

"Do you want me to stay up with you?" he asked.

"No, thank you. I'll be fine."

Michael simply nodded and left the sitting room, heading directly for the grand staircase. A few minutes later he entered his new bedroom, which was a mirror image of Karen's. However, he did not take the time to explore it in great detail. Instead, he kicked his boots off and laid down on the bed. The past few days had been arduous for everyone, but he was certain life would regain some normalcy now that Karen had made a temporary truce with her father.

A hint of a smile touched Michael's lips as he closed his eyes for the night. His soulmate really was a remarkable young woman, and he was, once again, reminded of how much he truly loved her.

38. October 5, 1997

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****October 5, 1997****

"When did you find out about Eleanor?" Dawn asked Karen.

The two teenagers were sitting alone together on the veranda eating breakfast and enjoying the unseasonably warm morning.

"She told me Wednesday night soon after you had come in from being with Markus," the brunette said.

Dawn nodded and popped a grape into her mouth. "It's sad," she said at last, "but I have never been extremely close with her. I know losing her will be hard for you, though."

"Yeah," agreed Karen.

Dawn set her empty plate on the round glass tabletop and looked at her friend.

"Nathaniel's pretty angry that she refused treatment."

The brunette nodded. "I figured he would be, but I don't blame Eleanor for not wanting to prolong her illness."

"No, I don't either," Dawn stated.

The girls sat quietly for a few minutes, each just staring over the lake. Dawn finally broke the silence by asking, "So, where's Michael?"

Karen shrugged. "I'm assuming he's still upstairs in his room."

Dawn's eyebrows instantly lifted. "_His_ room?"

The brunette sighed. "Yeah, from now until our wedding night he wants us to remain celibate."

"Oh?" the other inquired. "And how's that working out for you?"

The brunette shrugged. "Fine so far, but I passed out hard last night. I think tonight will be a different story. It's going to feel strange not sleeping next to him."

Dawn frowned. "Is living in separate bedrooms really necessary? I mean can't you two just exhibit some self-control?"

"Yes, but it's going to be a real challenge. Why make it harder on ourselves by sharing the same room?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right," the blonde teenager said.

"Besides," Karen added, "this will make our wedding night feel more special, too."

Dawn nodded in agreement. "Hey, may I ask you something? It's rather personal, but there's no one else I can really talk to about sex."

"Sure," her friend answered.

"Have you and Michael ever tried anal?"

The color drained from Karen's face, and Dawn instantly knew she had crossed into dangerous territory. However, before she could apologize for her abrasive question, Karen said, "Yes, but not with Michael, and not under circumstances I wish to speak about."

Dawn pursed her lips together. She saw the pain in Karen's eyes and wished there was something she could do to vanquish it. "Does Michael know?" she softly asked.

The brunette shook her head. "No" mostly because he has never shown any interest in trying it."

"Well, Mark has," Dawn admitted, blushing slightly. "He tried touching me there with just his finger, but it was too uncomfortable for me, so he stopped. He wants to try it again, next time with lube. I was just wondering if you thought that might help."

"I assume it would," Karen said, "but I think you would also have to be really worked up for it not to hurt."

Dawn nodded. "So, would you ever want to try it again, with Michael?"

Karen gave her head a negative shake. "I know it would feel different with him, but I'm still worried that it might trigger flashbacks, and I don't want him knowing what happened. I just don't."

Dawn reached across the table and squeezed her friend's hand. "I promise I won't tell," she said.

"Thanks, I appreciate that." Karen dabbed the corner of her eyes with the edge of her napkin just as the set of French doors opened. She quickly laid the cloth back on her lap and raised her glass of apple juice to her lips, hiding her reddened nose.

To Dawn's sheer surprise, both Michael (clad in his usual coveralls) and her mother stepped onto the veranda. Even Karen's eyes widened behind her drink at the unexpected sight.

The killer gave his fianc  a long look, as though he instinctively knew something wasn't quite right with her. The brunette set her glass down and met his gaze while Johanna sat down next to Dawn.

"Hi, Mom," the blonde teenager cheerfully greeted, trying to lighten the mood.

"Hi, sweetie. How are you doing this morning?"

"Fine. You?"

"I'm doing well," Johanna replied.

Michael moved a chair close to Karen and took her hand.

"I'm fine, too," she told him. "Dawn and I were just talking about Eleanor."

Good save, thought Dawn.

Michael mutely nodded in understanding.

"Nathaniel's having a hard time with it," Johanna stated. "He's still trying to convince her to seek treatment, but I had a friend who went through chemo and radiation, and she ended up dying much sooner than expected because of how her body reacted to all the chemicals. After seeing what my friend went through, I certainly don't fault Eleanor for choosing quality over quantity, especially at this stage."

"Neither do we," Dawn said.

Her mother reached for a blueberry bagel and then turned her gaze onto Karen. "Derek and I will be staying here one more day so that I can enroll Dawn in school in the morning. I was thinking if you came with us, we could go dress shopping afterwards."

Karen's expression instantly brightened. "Yes! That would be great!" she exclaimed. "Thanks!"

A hint of a smile touched Michael's lips at his fiancÃ©'s enthusiastic response, but Dawn knew enough not to draw attention to it.

"It's the least I can do," Johanna said, taking a bite of her bagel. "Besides, spending the day together will be fun."

"Definitely," Dawn agreed.

Her mother finished her bagel and then sat back in her chair, her mood visibly darkening. "So, would anyone care to tell me who was on the phone Friday afternoon?" she asked, "I was under the impression that Dawn's whereabouts were supposed to remain a secret."

Dawn felt her cheeks flush. "Er, well..."

Michael sighed and shook his head. "You may as well just tell her the truth, Dawn," he said.

"Fine," she relented. "It was Markus VanTroy. I met him a few days ago while he was here working on a case with Uncle Nathaniel."

"So this man is older, then?" Johanna assumed.

"Yeah," Dawn admitted. "He was supposed to come over yesterday, but he cancelled once he heard that you and Dad were visiting."

Johanna's gaze hardened. "Is that why you left in such a huff?"

Dawn wordlessly nodded, not trusting her voice.

"I see," her mother simply voiced, though there was no mistaking the disappointment in her tone.

Michael suddenly rose to his feet, pulling Karen up alongside of him. "We'll give you two some privacy," he said. "However, before we leave, I would like to point out that Markus is aware of our situation and understands the importance of keeping the matter to himself."

Johanna cordially nodded. "Thank you, Michael."

He returned the nod. Then, the engaged couple promptly vanished from sight.

"He sure is something," Johanna commented, giving her head a slight shake.

"Not quite what you expected?" asked Dawn.

"No, not entirely," her mother confessed. "His love for Karen completely astounds me."

"I tried telling you, Mom. They really are meant to be together."

"Yes, I understand that now," Johanna poured herself a glass of juice and said, "So, tell me more about Markus. What is he like?"

Dawn shrugged. "I honestly don't know much about him. We spent most of our time together talking about me."

Johanna frowned. "Yet you're obviously attracted to him."

"Yes, very," the teenager admitted.

"Dawn, just please be careful," her mother commanded. "You're only seventeen. If your father found outâ€"

"Wait, you're not going to tell him, are you?" the younger frantically asked.

Johanna sighed. "No, as long as you promise to be careful."

Dawn exhaled a deep breath of relief. "I promise."

"All right, then I won't say anything to him."

Dawn stood up and hugged her mother. "Thanks, Mom. You're the best."

"You're welcome, sweetie. Now, what do you say we go inside and see what your father is doing? Perhaps, we could find a board game to play or something."

Dawn instantly nodded. "Yeah, that sounds like fun."

Together, the mother and daughter left the veranda in order to search for Derek.

* * *

><p>Mark groggily opened his eyes when the phone next to his bed rang. Moaning, he reached for it, wondering who would be calling him before ten o'clock on a Sunday morning. He lifted the receiver and brought it to his ear. "Markus here," he answered.<p>

"Good morning, Markus," Nathaniel Helms greeted, also sounding tired. "I'm sorry to bother you, but am calling to let you know that I will

be taking a personal day tomorrow, so I'll need you to stop by at some point today to pick some important paperwork for the Sanders case."

Mark instantly frowned. Nathaniel Helms never took time off from work. "Is everything all right, Sir?" he asked.

"Actually, no," the older man admitted. "We had a close call with Dawn on Friday, and yesterday I learned that my mother is dying of cancer. Between the two events, I got very little sleep this weekend. I'm sure you understand."

Mark stared down at the floor, his heart dropping into his stomach. "I'm very sorry to hear about your mother," he said, "but what happened to Dawn. Is she all right?"

Nathaniel hesitated before answering. "That's something you will have to speak to her about."

"Are your in-laws still there?" asked Mark.

"Yes. They won't be leaving until tomorrow evening."

The raven-haired man pinched the bridge of his nose. "All right, Nathaniel. I will be by around noon to pick up the paperwork."

"Very good. We shall see you then. Good-bye, Marcus."

"Good-bye, Nathaniel."

Although Mark still felt very anxious about visiting the Helms' residence with Dawn's parents lurking about, the prospect of seeing her again motivated him to leave his bed and get ready for the day.

* * *

><p>Instead of playing a board game, Dawn and her parents were outside in the courtyard playing badminton. In order to make the teams even, they had recruited Karen to play with them.<p>

Even though they were just playing for fun, the game became quite competitive as the score fluctuated between the two teams. However, in the end, Dawn awarded her and Karen the victory by striking the shuttle hard at her mother's feet.

"Nice shot!" the brunette exclaimed, grinning.

Dawn returned her smile. "Thanks."

"Yes, good game, girls," Derek agreed.

"Are you up for a rematch?" Dawn asked while twirling her racket in her hand.

"Not now, sweetie," Johanna replied. "It's almost lunchtime."

"I'll play a singles game with you before we eat," Karen offered.

Dawn beamed, glad that she didn't have to go inside quite yet.
"Great!"

Derek and Johanna returned to the mansion, leaving the two teenagers to their game.

Neither Dawn nor Karen bothered to keep score during their scrimmage. In fact, right now they were just seeing how long they could keep a rally going. They were just about to reach fifteen hits when Dawn caught sight of a black car turning into the drive. She instantly lowered her hand, ignoring the shuttle as it landed softly in the grass behind her.

"Dawn...?" Karen inquired, also looking at the vehicle.

"It's him," Dawn muttered. "Mark."

"Oh," Karen answered as he parked his Cadillac. "I wonder what he's doing here."

The blonde girl shrugged. "I have no idea."

Mark stepped out of his car, sporting black pants and a white dress shirt. He strode across the lawn to where the two girls were standing. "Hello, Karen," he politely greeted.

"Hello, Markus," she responded, mimicking his tone.

He faced Dawn next. "I am here to pick up some important documents from your uncle, but I would really like the opportunity to speak with you. Will you wait for me?"

Dawn slowly nodded. "Yes."

"Thank you. I will be back shortly."

After Mark left, Karen said, "Well, I suppose I should go in and check on Michael. I'll talk to you later, all right?"

"Yeah, okay," Dawn agreed.

Time crawled by while she waited for Mark. Twenty minutes later he exited the mansion, holding a manila envelope, which he took directly to his car. Then, he walked to her. Without saying a word, he grabbed her hand and led her to the same spot he had taken her Wednesday night. "Mark, we really need to talk," she said, trying to pull her hand free.

"In a few minutes. I promise."

Dawn jerked her hand, finally freeing it. "No, I can't do this with youâ€"not anymore. I'm sorry, Mark."

When she turned away from him, he asked, "What changed, Dawn?"

"I have," she said, looking at him. "After you called on Friday, I left the mansion, and Bonnie Davis' murderer attacked me. If it hadn't been for Karen killing him, I know I wouldn't have survived the encounter. What I experienced during that time changed my perspective on our relationship."

Mark didn't say anything for a full minute, his gaze focused on a nearby tree. "What did the man do to you, Dawn?" he inquired at last, his voice eerily quiet.

The teenager's eyes narrowed. "Does it really matter?"

"Yes," he sternly insisted. "I need to know."

She studied her companion intently and then shook her head. "No, Mark, you don't need to know," she stated. "Wednesday night, you made it very clear that you don't want anything more than a physical relationship, and telling you what happened would cross that boundary, at least for me."

When Mark didn't offer a response, Dawn continued speaking. "Karen made a temporary truce with her father, so I'm now able to enroll in school here. Maybe I'll meet someone there who will be willing to give me the emotional attachment that I now want."

"No." The word hung between them until Mark said, "There's no reason to look for someone else, Dawn. I can give you what you need."

She blinked, her heart skipping a beat. "You can?" she breathed. "Are you sure?"

Mark nodded. "The moment I learned that a young woman had been killed not far from here, I became extremely angry with Michael for failing to protect you. That's when I realized you were starting to mean more to me than just another girl to fuck." He ran a hand through his lush raven hair. "I like you, Dawn."

She instantly smiled at him. "I like you, too, Mark."

He opened his arms to her, and she did not hesitate to step into them. "Now will you tell me what the man did to you?"

Dawn nodded, her mood turning somber. "He drugged me and then forced me to give him oral, though, by that time, I was too far gone to fight it."

Mark's expression darkened. "You mentioned you left the safety of the mansion. Why?"

The teenager shrugged, "I was feeling angry and hurt, and I just wanted to leave."

"Because of me." It was a statement, not a question.

She gave her head another nod and said, "I was really looking forward to our date."

"I'm sorry, Dawn, I should have just told you the truth when I called. I was scared."

"Of meeting my parents. I know." she told him.

Mark shook his head. "No, of you," he confessed. "I wasn't looking to be in a serious relationship with anybody, but the moment I caught you in your uncle's study, I knew you had the potential to change

that. The attraction I felt towards you was instant and strong. I wanted to fuck you right then and there with so much more than just my tongue."

"I know," Dawn uttered as he made the area between her legs tingle with desire.

Mark reached down and slipped his hand into the waistband of her jeans. He wiggled his middle finger against her nub, creating a damp spot on the front of her panties. "Dawn, do you me to fuck your wet pussy with my hard cock right now?" he huskily asked.

"Yes!" she gasped.

Using his other hand, he pulled a small bottle of lube out of his pocket, along with a condom. Just seeing the two items caused more moisture to form on Dawn's panties.

"Someone's sure getting excited," he noted.

"Very," she agreed.

"In that case, let's have some fun."

After yanking their pants down, Mark had Dawn lay on the ground with her knees bent and spread wide open. He unfurled the condom over his shaft while staring down at her exposed openings. "We'll start with your pussy first," he said. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," she choked out. "I want you so badly."

Mark grinned. "I know." He knelt between her knees and leisurely pushed himself into her. "You're still so tight."

Dawn just moaned in response, loving how full he was making her feel. Once he was completely sheathed inside of her, he began rocking against her. "Oh, Mark," she sighed.

His movements gradually increased until she reached her climax. Then, he pulled out and popped open the lube's cap. He spread a generous amount the cool liquid around her nether hole. Using his index finger, he smeared some of it inside the tight opening. When Dawn winced, he bent his head and grazed his lips against hers. "Just try to relax, honey. I'm only going to use my finger right now, all right?"

She mutely nodded, willing her body to remain placid as Mark slipped his digit farther into her. She groaned painfully while he skillfully stretched the hole. However, as her body became accustomed to the strange sensation of his finger working that sensitive area, she began to find pleasure in it. "Oh..." she moaned.

"That's it, honey. Enjoy it," he encouraged, simultaneously sliding two fingers from his other hand into her womanhood.

"Oh, fuck! Mark!" she shrieked. "I'm not going to last much longer!"

"That's all right, Dawn. Let yourself go."

"No," she hissed between gritted teeth. "I want more. Please give me more."

Mark looked at her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, oh yes...I'm sure. I need to feel you. Please!"

Mark extracted his finger from her nether hole and squirted some lube onto his condom-clad erection. He then eased its slick length into the small opening, stretching it even farther. His fingers continued their thrusting, and she came hard, clenching down on his digits.

Before Dawn realized it, her companion was withdrawing from her and sitting back on his heels, his emerald eyes trained on her face. "Mark, did you come?" she asked, feeling self-conscious.

He gave his head a light shake. "This wasn't about me, Dawn. It was about you."

She sat up and touched his manhood. "But I want you to come," she told him.

"Where?"

She contemplated his question for a long moment. "In my mouth," she answered at last.

"Dawn, honey, I'm not sure if that's a good idea considering your recent experience with oral," he countered.

"Mark," she retorted, her patience wearing thin, "I want to taste you. Please."

After removing his condom and discretely burying it in the ground, Mark stood to his full height. He offered his manhood to Dawn, surrendering to her desires. She excitedly knelt before him and engulfed his shaft with her mouth. While she orally pleased him, she ran her fingers up and down his thickness, finally touching him for the first time.

"Oh, honey..." he groaned.

She sucked, licked, and touched Mark's erection until he let loose, shooting his warm seed into her mouth.

"Dawn, you're amazing," he praised.

She grinned bashfully at the compliment as she wiped the corners of her mouth with the pad of her thumb. "Thanks."

The couple dressed, both knowing that their time together was drawing to a close.

"I wish you could stay," Dawn said. "There's still so much I want to tell you."

"I do not doubt that," Mark replied. "I'll stop by later in the week so that we can talk in a more proper setting."

She smiled. "I look forward to it."

The raven-haired man pulled the teenager to him and kissed her. "As do I." He smoothed out her ruffled platinum locks and then dropped his hands to his sides. "I'll see you later, Dawn."

"Yes. Good-bye, Mark."

They parted ways, but Dawn took comfort in the knowledge that Mark wanted to develop a friendship with her, maybe even more. And because of Karen's courageous phone call, the blonde girl felt a lot more comfortable delving into a more serious relationship. She was hardly expecting the outcome of marriage, but it was definitely better fucking Mark now that they were on friendlier terms.

Dawn entered the mansion and strolled to the kitchen. Her parents and aunt and uncle were sitting around the table eating a casual lunch. Neither Michael nor Karen was anywhere to be seen. The teenager figured she would catch up with her friends later. Right now she planned to relax and enjoy lunch with her family.

* * *

><p>Later that evening, Karen sauntered down the corridor to her bedroom. Michael had gone out hunting just for something to do and had yet to return. Meanwhile, Dawn had filled her in about Markus. Despite Karen's reservations about him, she was relieved that he wanted to keep seeing her friend. Perhaps all was not lost after all.<p>

The brunette walked into her room but stopped short in threshold, her eyes staring at the nightstand. Michael's mask was gone, and in its place sat a sheet of stationary paper that had been folded neatly in half. Inscribed on its front were the words, I LOVE YOU.

A smile spread over Karen's lips. "I love you, too," she murmured aloud. Then, she got ready for bed. After turning off the antique chandelier, she crawled underneath her blankets and closed her eyes, calling it a night.

As she had predicted earlier that day, Karen had a difficult time sleeping. She woke up several times during the night after having sexually explicit dreams about her and Michael. The last dream had left her feeling particularly needy. She knew she shouldn't, but she slipped a hand down her pajama pants and into her panties. This was the first time she had touched herself without Michael present. It felt somewhat naughty, yet not enough to deter her from rubbing a fingertip against her wet nub.

Karen shut her eyes, imagining that it was Michael's finger touching her instead. She was just getting into the fantasy when Michael's face suddenly morphed into her father's. A shocked cry escaped her lips and her eyelids flew open. She instantly removed her hand from her pants, her heart beating hard in her chest.

Suddenly, Karen's bedroom door flung open. She quickly pulled her blankets up to her waist just as Michael stepped through the doorway. "Are you all right?" he asked, nearing the bed. "I heard you scream."

The teenager blinked, not realizing she had yelled so loudly. "I'm sorry, Michael," she apologized as she sat up. "I didn't mean to wake you. I just had a bad dream." She was much too embarrassed to tell him the full truth.

"A nightmare?" he asked, not sounding at all pleased. "Of what?"

"Well, it started off as a dream about you, but then your face turned into my father's, and that's when I woke up."

Michael sat down on the bedside chair. "Was it a sexual dream?"

Karen mutely nodded.

"I see."

"There are a lot of unresolved issues concerning my father that I still have to work through," she said.

"Not only that but you may be suffering from repressed memories that my presence has kept dormant up until now."

"But I clearly remember all the times I spent with him," argued Karen.

"Up until you fell asleep," Michael responded. "However, I believe you were subconsciously aware of what he did to you after that."

She shook her head. "That's something I don't even want to think about."

"But it happened, Karen, and now it looks like you're going to have to confront and deal with those memories before you and I are married."

The teenager knew of one way to keep the memories at bay and that was not to touch herself unless Michael was with her, but she wasn't going to tell him that. Instead, she simply said, "Yeah, I guess so."

Michael leaned forward and tenderly caressed the back of her hand. "Would you like me to stay with you until you fall back to sleep?"

Karen gave her head a small shake. "No, I'll be all right. Thank you, though."

"Very well," the killer replied, lifting his hand. "Good night, sweetness."

"Good night, Michael."

Once he left, the brunette settled her head back into her pillow and tried to fall back to sleep.

* * *

><p>Michael paced the length of his bedroom's floor. He understood

that Karen's nightmares were part of the healing process, but that didn't mean he had to like it. He hated to see her scared. And, yes, she was scared. Her hand had still been shaking slightly when he had touched it, betraying her fear.<p>

Michael sat down on his bed and stared at the far wall. There was no denying that his lover had acted bravely against her father to ensure Dawn's safety. However, if Karen was going to truly defeat David Miller, then she would have to conquer her fear of him. The killer just hoped she had given herself enough time to accomplish that task, for so much now hung in the balance.

39. October 6, 1997: Part 1

****ONE DAY LATER****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

****October 6, 1997****

Karen stared out of the Helms' Mercedes' back passenger window, stifling yet another yawn. The morning had been a whirlwind of activity from enrolling Dawn into Waukegan High School to shopping for school supplies. After treating the two teenagers to lunch, Mrs. Johnson was now driving them to a bridal boutique. However, the busyness of the day was finally catching up to the brunette, who had gotten very little sleep the night before.

"Hey, are you doing okay?" Dawn asked.

Karen turned her face away from the glass to look at her friend.
"Yeah, I'm just tired."

Johanna glanced into the rear view mirror and said, "It's been a rough few days for _everyone_."

The brunette mutely nodded, refusing to make any comparisons. Dawn, though, gave her an empathetic smile, which made her feel slightly better.

Once they arrived at Flora's Bridal Boutique, Karen put all her troubles aside and solely focused her thoughts on her upcoming nuptials with Michael. She entered the quaint shop with Johanna and Dawn. As her eyes scanned the racks for the perfect wedding gown, a gray-haired woman greeted the small group.

"May I help you ladies with something?"

"Yes," answered Johanna. "Karen, here, is looking to buy a wedding dress."

The sales associate's dull jade eyes scrutinized the brunette for a long moment, her gaze lingering on the teenager's flat stomach. "I see. When is the wedding?"

Karen suddenly shook her head, angry at the woman's judgmental assumption. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Johnson, but I don't want to buy anything here. Can we please look elsewhere?"

"Ladies, is there a problem?" another female associate questioned upon her hasty approach.

"Yes," Karen honestly answered. "Just because I am marrying young doesn't mean that I am pregnant. My fianc  and I happen to be deeply in love with each other, thank you very much." With that, she spun around and left the boutique. Johanna and Dawn were quick to follow.

"Karen, wait," Johanna commanded. "I know you're upset, and you have every right to be, but this place has the best wedding dress selection in town. Please just give them another chance. Please?"

"No, Mom," Dawn interjected. "That lady was just plain rude and doesn't deserve our business. There must be another store around here that sells decent wedding dresses."

Johanna sighed. "We can certainly look, but I'm not promising that we'll find anything."

"I'll take that chance," Karen said.

"Fine," Johanna relented. "Let's go."

As Johanna drove the two teenagers through the streets of downtown Waukegan, Karen spotted a storefront with a colorful array of prom dresses displayed in the window. Somehow she knew that her dream dress was in that shop. "Hey, let's check out that store!" she excitedly suggested.

"All right," Johanna said, parking the car in front of James' Formal Wear.

Karen barely waited for the Mercedes to stop moving before jumping out and bounding up to the store's glass door.

A brunette man sporting a slick crew cut opened the door for her. "Welcome," he said, giving her a genuine smile. "My name is James. How are you doing today?"

"I'm great now that I'm here," Karen replied. "I'm looking for a dress for a very special occasion."

"Well, you've come to the right place," James assured her. "Please come in and have a look around."

"Thank you."

Karen entered the shop with Johanna and Dawn close on her heels. She leisurely strolled among the fixtures and mannequins, closely examining all the various dresses and styles.

"Do you have something specific in mind?" James asked.

The brunette girl shook her head. "No, but I'll know it when I see it."

"Is the dress for a school dance or for Halloween?"

"Neither," Karen told him. "It's for a weddingâ€”my wedding, actually."

James gasped dramatically. "Oh, how fantastic! But, unfortunately, I don't have many white dresses in stock right now."

"That's all right," said Karen. "I'm not set on white."

"Well, in that case, I have a special order to show you. Come this way."

Karen, Johanna, and Dawn followed James to the back of the store. On a rack all by themselves hung two black garment bags.

"A wealthy couple from Wisconsin designed these to wear at their daughter's wedding," James explained. "However, a few weeks before the wedding, the bride decided not to marry the groom, so her parents simply abandoned these garments. They are both bought and paid for, and I was at a loss on what to do with themâ€”until now." He unzipped the first bag, unveiling a midnight blue three-piece suit, complete with a crisp white dress shirt and an indigo satin tie.

"Oh," Karen breathed.

"Michael would look very dashing in this," Johanna agreed, "but he's quite tall. I'm not sure if it would fit him."

"This suit was made for a man who was six foot five. Is he taller than that?"

Karen shook her head, suddenly feeling a little lightheaded. "No, he's about that tall himself."

James clapped his hands together. "Perfect! Now for the piece of resistance. Are you ready to see it?"

Karen mutely nodded.

The man purposely blocked her view with his body while he slowly unzipped the second bag, adding to the suspense of the moment. Only once the garment was completely free of its bag did he finally step away.

Karen stopped breathing, her eyes transfixed on the midnight blue gown hanging down from the cloth hanger. The gown itself was elegantly simple with its strapless satin bodice and full A-line floor-length skirt. However, it was the dress' long-sleeved organza overlay that transformed the gown from elegant to exquisite. Embedded within the overlay's fine indigo fibers were hundreds of small diamonds, which all sparkled brilliantly underneath the store's light. "It looks just like the night sky," Karen softly commented. "It's absolutely stunning."

James smiled at her. "Would you like to try it on?"

"Yes, please."

James showed Karen to a fitting room. Her body trembled as she exchanged her black sweater and blue jeans for the indigo gown. When she exited the fitting room, Dawn's eyes instantly welled up with

tears.

"Oh, Karen, you look so beautiful."

The brunette teenager stepped in front of a full-length mirror, her gaze riveted on her reflection. The dress was everything she wanted and more. It suited her perfectly.

"There's no denying that it's a gorgeous gown," Johanna said. "However, it needs a veil to complete the wedding dress look. I don't suppose you sell those here."

James shook his head. "Unfortunately, no. You'll have to go to an actual bridal shop for that."

"But you do carry shoes here, correct?"

"Yes, and most of them are dyeable. Would you like to see them?"

"Yes," Karen answered, "but first, Dawn needs a bridesmaid's dress—preferably in light blue, if you have it."

James appeared thoughtful for a long moment and then nodded. "I have just the one," he stated. "I'll be right back."

While he went to retrieve the other garment, Karen continued to admire her gown in the looking-glass.

"I can't believe the girl's mother just left that dress here," Dawn said. "The diamonds alone must be worth some money."

"Obviously not enough for her to worry about," Johanna replied.

"Well, I love it," Karen declared. "The suit, too. I just hope we'll be able to find the right veil for this dress."

"I'm sure we will," Johanna told her, "but I think we'll have to go back to Flora's to find it."

The brunette reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"All right, ladies, here's the dress," James said, holding it up for them to see. "What do you think?"

"Oh, yes, that's it!" Dawn shrieked.

"Dawn, sweetie, try to contain yourself," Johanna reprimanded.

"It's all right," James stated. "I'm excited, too. Here." He passed the dress to the blonde teenager. "Try it on."

Dawn smiled and dashed into a fitting room.

"So, when's the big day?" asked James.

"I don't know," Karen admitted. "I haven't been told the date. Michael wants to surprise me."

"Oh, a surprise wedding! How delightful!"

Karen smirked. "I suppose that depends on which side of the surprise you are on."

The man chuckled. "Yes, I suppose so. Still, though, it sounds like you're fianc  has a special day planned for you."

"Very special," Johanna confirmed. "Karen's been through a lot, and he wants to give her the very best."

"He sounds like a good guy," James said.

Karen smiled softly. "He is to me."

"And me," Dawn chimed in as she neared the mirror. She twirled in a circle, showing off the chic floor-length satin sheath that matched the exact shade of her cornflower eyes. "So, what do you think? Pretty, huh?"

"Stunning," Karen concurred, specifically eyeing the gown's jeweled straps.

"Rhinestones?" she asked James.

He gave his head a negative shake. "Swarovski Crystals imported directly from Austria. I know they're not quite the same as diamonds, but I thought this dress would compliment yours very nicely."

Karen nodded. "You were right. We'll take it."

"Wonderful! Now, let's go look at shoes."

In less than an hour, both Karen and Dawn had picked out a pair of dyable satin slippers and were now sitting in the rear seat of the Mercedes on their way back to Flora's.

"Well, that was fun," Dawn said, grinning. "Michael's going to love your gown."

"Yes," the brunette agreed. "I just hope he'll like his suit."

"Don't worry, Karen; I'm sure he will. It's a very sophisticated look."

Karen smiled. "Yeah, I know. I can't wait to see him in it."

A few minutes later Johanna, once again, parked the black Mercedes behind Flora's Bridal Boutique. Karen carried her garment bag into the shop. Despite its wide selection in upscale wedding dresses, she knew nothing in the store could compare to the gown she had acquired at James' Formal Wear.

The female associate, who had intervened on Karen's behalf earlier, greeted the small group. "Oh good, you came back," she said.

"Only because I need a veil for my dress," Karen curtly informed her.

The light-haired woman nodded. "I can help you with that." She quickly guided the brunette to a fitting room. "My name is Gloria, by the way."

"I'm Karen, and this is my best friend Dawn and her mother Johanna," the teenager said, gesturing to her two companions.

"Well, while you get dressed, I'll make your friends comfortable in the seating area. If you need anything in the meantime, please let me know."

"Thank you," Karen said, closing the door.

After switching clothes, the brunette walked out of the small room to model her gown for the sales associate.

"Oh. My. God," Gloria gasped. "Wherever did you find that dress?"

"At James' Formal Wear," Karen answered. "It was a special order that the owner no longer wanted."

"That's quite a find."

"I know."

Gloria guided the brunette to a tall mirror near where Johanna and Dawn were seated. Then, the woman knelt down next to the brunette and adjusted the tulle underneath the gown's long satin skirt, making it even fuller. "So, what style of veil do you want?" the woman asked, standing up.

Karen shrugged. "I don't know, maybe a long one since the dress doesn't have a train?"

Gloria nodded. "I have a few different cathedral veils I can show you. I'll be right back."

When the associate returned, she was carrying an arm load of veils. "I brought some fingertip veils for you to see as well. Some people wear both styles so that they can take the cathedral veil off after their wedding ceremony and still have a veil to wear at their reception."

"Oh, I like that idea," Karen admitted.

Gloria proceeded to hang the veils on a hook and asked, "Which ones would you like to try on first?"

Karen instantly pointed to the two sheerest and plainest veils in the bunch. "I like those," she stated.

Nodding, Gloria grabbed the matching set and gently stuck the combs into the teenager's hair. Once the translucent veils were in place, the woman backed away from the looking-glass. Karen stared mutely into the mirror and instantly began to tear up as she saw herself as a bride for the first time.

Dawn quickly left her chair and embraced the brunette.

"This is really happening," Karen muttered into her friend's shoulder. "Michael and I are really getting married."

"Yes," Dawn said, "and it's going to be a wonderful day."

Karen nodded and took a small step backwards, breaking the hug.

Gloria promptly handed her a tissue.

"Thanks," the brunette said, drying her eyes and nose.

While Karen regained her composure, Gloria asked, "Is there anything else you need—a head piece or jewelry perhaps? I have a sterling silver tiara that is embellished with sapphires, if you would like to see it."

Johanna must have seen the look of disdain on Karen's face because she hurried to the brunette's side and said, "Thank you, Gloria, but we just need the veils today. My family will provide Karen with the rest."

"All right, should I ring these up for you, then?"

Karen gave a nod of approval. "Yes, please."

Gloria took the veils and walked up to the front desk. Johanna followed her while Dawn accompanied Karen to the fitting room.

"It's good to see you so happy," the blonde girl said as she unzipped the brunette's gown. It wasn't until Karen stepped out of the organza and satin and reached for her sweater that the color drained from Dawn's face. Karen hastily put the sweater on, concealing her jagged scar from view.

Dawn remained quiet as the brunette dressed and packed her gown away. Karen wasn't sure what to say to her friend, so she simply let the blonde girl be, which made for a quiet trip back to the Helms' estate.

Instead of Patrick, Derek and Michael greeted the Mercedes at the gate. Johanna exited the vehicle first and headed straight for the trunk.

"I'm glad that Michael is making an effort to bond with my parents," Dawn said while she unfastened her seatbelt, breaking her silence at last. "That makes me feel a little better."

"Definitely," Karen agreed just before the killer opened her door. "Such chivalry Michael. Thank you."

He simply nodded as he reached for her hand.

Karen stepped out of the car and quietly asked, "Is everything okay?"

Michael offered her another nod. "Yes, everything is fine, sweetness. I just missed you."

"I know," she empathized. "I missed you, too."

In the meantime, Derek joined his wife at the rear of the car and began helping her unload the trunk. "Well, from the looks of it, you ladies had a very successful day," he said.

"Very," Johanna confirmed. "Dawn is now enrolled in school, which she starts tomorrow, and we found the girls' dresses for the wedding, along with a suit for you, Michael." She briefly held up the garment bag for him to see.

"It looks nice," he sarcastically replied, specifically addressing Karen.

"Oh stop it," she lightly scolded as Derek and Johanna started walking towards the mansion. "But, you will have to try it on before the wedding to make sure it fits."

Michael smirked at her. "Yes, sweetness."

"Ass," she muttered under her breath.

"I love you, too, Karen."

The sincerity in the killer's tone instantly changed the playful mood between them. The teenager quickly diverted her attention to the trunk. She reached into it and pulled out the only two bags left.

"Your gown?" Michael quietly inquired, his eyes, once again, finding hers.

Karen nodded, her breath catching slightly. "And my veils."

He extended a hand and reverently touched the bags as though he, too, understood the significance of the garments concealed within them.

"Michael, how much longer do I have to wait?" the teenager asked.

He held her gaze and said, "Karen, I promise that by the end of the month we will be married, just like you requested."

She released a small sigh of relief. "Thank you," she said, "because this is torture."

"I know, sweetness."

She shifted her bags in her arms so that she could close the trunk. Meanwhile, Michael cast his gaze onto Dawn, whose color still had not returned to her cheeks.

"She saw my scar," Karen murmured, "and I'm not sure what to say to her."

"I'll talk to her," the killer generously offered, "as long as you don't mind."

The younger brunette shook her head. "No. I really should get ready for dinner, anyway."

"All right, sweetness. I'll meet up with you with you later, then."

"Sounds good."

Michael bent his head and gave Karen's crown a quick kiss before she parted ways with him, which made her smile.

* * *

><p>After watching his fiancÃ© pass through the mansion's front door, Michael purposefully approached Dawn. "Karen claims that you saw her scar."<p>

The blonde girl slowly nodded. "When she told me she had been stabbed, I was under the impression that it was just a flesh wound. Now that I have actually seen her scar, I'm not sure what to think. Am I wrong to assume that she should have died?"

"No, Dawn," Michael said, "your assumption is very accurate. That man stabbed her with every intent of killing her, and he should have succeeded."

"I know my mom holds you responsible for changing Karen, but in all reality, shouldn't she have already died at the hands of her father? He put her through hell, Michael."

"I know," he softly replied. "And, yes, he should have killed her."

"Do you think he knows that?"

"That's the question now, isn't it?" mused Michael. "Was her father in denial about her failing health, or did he have some kind of inclination that her body could withstand such abuse? Unfortunately, I don't have an answer for you, Dawn."

"Okay," she said. "Then, let me ask you this. Before Karen left Haddonfield, she was barely eating. If you hadn't intervened, do you think she would have died?"

The killer deliberately nodded. "There's no doubt that Karen's body showed incredible strength throughout the years. Yet, as you said, it was starting to shut down. If I hadn't met up with her again, I highly doubt she would be alive today."

"But even after your second meeting, she still almost diedâ€"twice."

"Yes. Had I known the full extent of her illness, I would have stayed here with her. I did not realize that her body wasn't strong enough to go through detox. The second time, however, was a test of her mental strength, and there wasn't a damn thing I could do to help her through that. In the end, she had to choose whether to live or die."

"Those three days were the worst," Dawn reminisced.

"Yes," the killer agreed. "Seeing Karen almost give up the battle she had fought so hard to survive scared the living hell out of me. Words

cannot express how much I love her, Dawn."

"Karen loves you just as much, Michael," she softly voiced.

He gave his head a sharp nod. "I know."

Dawn turned quiet, her pale blue eyes searching his. Then, before Michael could react, she stood on her toes and pressed a firm kiss to his lips. He instinctively moved to push her away, but she withdrew on her own and fled towards the mansion, leaving him alone to mull over what had just happened.

40. October 6, 1997: Part 2

Dawn studied her reflection in her vanity's mirror as she wrapped a wide ivory sash around the waist of her sapphire blue knee-length dress. With trembling fingers, she looped the ends together to form a large bow in the small of her back. During the past hour, her mind kept replaying her last moments with Michael, which left her feeling both frazzled and frightened.

The teenager raised a hand to her mouth and lightly traced a finger over her lips. Kissing the killer had been a dark fantasy of hers for a while now, but she never thought herself capable of turning that fantasy into reality. Clearly, she had underestimated herself. And now Michael knew. However, that wasn't what scared her the most. No. It was how he planned on using knowledge that sent chills of fear down her spine. If he told Karen—

A loud knock on her door abruptly jarred Dawn from her thoughts. Frowning, she turned away from her likeness and called, "Who is it?"

"Your mother," answered the familiar voice on the other side of the door.

Breathing a sigh of relief, the blonde girl let her mother into the room and promptly locked the door behind her. "What's going on, Mom?"

Johanna gave the younger a long look. "You've been very quiet ever since we left Flora's. Is everything all right?"

Dawn nodded. "Yeah, Mom, everything's fine. I'm just nervous about starting school tomorrow, that's all."

"Really?" Johanna asked, not appearing at all convinced. "So your strange behavior has nothing to do with Karen's wedding?"

The teenager's posture instantly stiffened.

"Hmm, that's what I suspected," her mother said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Dawn deliberately shook her head. "Not with you."

Johanna's eyebrows lifted in enlightenment. "With whom, then? Michael?" When Dawn failed to respond, her mother continued the conversation by saying, "You and Michael have developed quite the

friendship."

Dawn defensively crossed her arms in front of her chest. "It's nothing like that, Mom."

"Certainly not on his end," Johanna agreed, "but what about on yours? Have your feelings for him remained neutral this whole time, or have they grown into something more?"

"Mom, stop it!" the teenager harshly demanded.

"You are treading down a very treacherous path," Johanna sternly warned. "Michael has eyes only for Karen, and Karen is your best friend. She risked her life to save yours. She loves you, Dawn."

The teenager's pale eyes glistened with tears. "I know, Mom. I love her, too."

"Then do yourself a favor and stop pining over Michael," Johanna said. "You know his feelings for Karen will never wane, and if she ever discovered that you harbored feelings for him, you would lose her trust. Is that a risk you're willing to take?"

"It might already be too late," Dawn dolefully stated.

Her mother's face visibly paled. "Why, Dawn? What did you do?"

At that moment, someone else knocked on the door.

"Jo, Dawn, it's time for dinner," Derek loudly voiced through the thick oak barrier.

"We're coming," Dawn replied, extremely grateful for the interruption. She hurried to the door and opened it for her father. He instantly looked between his wife and daughter, obviously sensing the tension in the room.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked.

The youngest Johnson gave her shoulders a subtle shrug. "Mom and I were just talking, but we're finished now."

The cop glanced at his wife for affirmation. "Jo?"

"It's fine, Derek," she conceded. "Let's just go downstairs and enjoy our last meal together."

"All right," he said as he reached for Johanna's hand. After she accepted it, the family left the bedroom without another word spoken.

* * *

><p>Dinner that night was a subdued affair. No one said much of anything, all seemingly absorbed in their own thoughts. Periodically, Karen caught Dawn looking at her from across the table while they ate their cod; however, every time the brunette tried to make eye contact, the blonde girl shied away. Karen pursed her lips together. Dawn was acting as though she was ashamed or guilty of something, but Karen couldn't imagine her friend doing anything that would prompt

those types of feelings, especially not in the short time frame of getting back from their shopping trip and now. To Karen's knowledge, the only thing Dawn had done before getting ready for dinner was talk to Michael, and that was hardly an unusual occurrence. No, there had to be something else bothering Dawn, and Karen was determined to find out what it was.<p>

After dinner the small group walked outside to bid farewell to Derek and Johanna. They gathered around the black Mercedes, which the Helms had agreed to let the couple borrow. Dawn seemed almost relieved that her parents were leaving, whereas Karen's mood was much more somber.

"I wish you didn't have to go," she told Derek.

"I know, kiddo, but we'll be back within the month for your wedding."

A soft smile touched her lips. "Michael and I are looking forward to it," she said, speaking for her fianc , who was conspicuously missing from the group.

Johanna tightly embraced her daughter. "Until then, Dawn, I want you to do well in school and study hard so that you can graduate on time."

"Yes, Mom. I will," the blonde teenager promised.

"Don't fret, Johanna. We'll all make sure she excels in her studies," Eleanor said for added assurance.

Johanna looked at the older woman over Dawn's crown. "Thank you, Eleanor. That would be very much appreciated."

"All right, Jo," Derek interjected. "If we want to get home at a decent time, we have to leave now."

Nodding, the woman released Dawn and headed to the passenger side of the car. "We'll keep in touch," she told Rebekah.

"Of course," the other sister replied.

Nathaniel cordially shook Derek's hand. "Have a safe trip," the former said.

"Yes, thank you. Good-bye, everyone."

The air was suddenly filled with a chorus of 'good-byes'.

Grinning, Derek closed his door and started the car.

Karen waved at the Mercedes until it disappeared from sight while the other members of the party returned to the warmth of the mansion.

"You're going to miss them," voiced Michael as he appeared at Karen's side.

She released a heavy sigh. "Yes, very much so," she confirmed.

He stepped behind her and wrapped his arms around her midsection, pressing his body firmly against her back. "You'll see them again soon enough."

Karen couldn't help but grin into the darkness. "I thought we were going to stick strictly to hand holding," she teased, changing the subject.

"Yes, well, I figured since we already crossed that boundary at the marina, I could cross it again tonight." He nuzzled the top of her head with his lips. "The truth is I just want to hold you," he said.

"Um, it feels like you're doing more than holding me," the teenager commented. She could distinctly feel his lips moving down towards the nape of her neck. "Michael, if you get me too worked upâ€"

"Then you have my blessing to take care of your needs later tonight. Right now, I just need this connection with you."

Karen forced the memories of the previous night from her mind as she asked, "Why?"

Without warning, the killer unzipped her long maroon dress. He then shoved the material passed her shoulders and trailed open-mouthed kisses over her newly exposed skin. "Do I need a reason, sweetness?" he countered.

She moaned low in her throat. The feeling of longing his kisses were creating deep within her body was getting very hard to ignore. "Hmm, something must have happened to make you cave like thisâ€|"

Michael dropped to his knees so that his mouth continued its torturous onslaught down Karen's spine. "Perhaps it's the knowledge that you bought our wedding attire today," he murmured against her bare flesh. "I cannot wait to see you in your gown."

"It's very beautiful," she said.

He affectionately nipped at her lower back. "Just like you."

Upon hearing Michael's words, Karen's mind was teleported to a different time and place. She was suddenly a child of eight, admiring the colorful trees surrounding her father's patrol car while he sat in the driver's seat, contently watching her. She was so young and innocent and naively oblivious to the evil that lay beneath the sheriff's calm façade. It wasn't until he had compared her prettiness to the trees that she saw that dangerous glint in his eye. It was the only warning she was givenâ€and it came too late. She fought him the best she could, yet it wasn't enough. She squeezed her eyes closed, trying to block out his declarations of love and the burning pain it physically caused her. It was just too much, the pain just too severe. She could no longer keep her tears at bay. They seeped out from under her closed eyelids, and she could feel them sliding down her cheeks. She wanted them to stop, but they just kept falling. Her chest felt extremely tight as silent sobs racked her body. She thought that maybe she was going to suffocate until a gentle voice broke through the haze of pain and despairâ€"

"Karen. Breathe."

Michael.

His gentle command shattered her memory, forcing the present to come back into focus. She was no longer lying in the dirt but was standing in the Helm's courtyard with her fianc , who was still planting soft kisses over her skin. The teenager raised a hand to rub her eyes and immediately discovered that her face was wet from fresh tears.

Although she had spoken to Michael about the rape, Karen had omitted the gory details from the morbid tale, because she had blocked them from her memory. She couldn't recall if it had been a conscious decision or if it had just happened. All she knew was that his words had triggered memories that had been lost to her for nearly ten years, and reliving them just now had completely overwhelmed her senses. "This is too much " she muttered to herself.

Michael must have heard her, because he instantly withdrew his mouth and said, "Forgive me, sweetness. I lost myself for a moment there."

"So did I," she quietly replied.

He quickly slid her zipper up to its proper place and then rose to his feet. "It's getting cold and late," he said. "I'll escort you to your quarters, if you'd like."

The teenager nodded, turning around. "Thanks, Michael. That would be great."

His obsidian eyes suddenly narrowed as he studied her face in the darkness. "Karen, have you been crying?"

"Yeah," she replied, knowing that there was no point in lying about it. "Apparently, you weren't the only one who needed that connection tonight."

Michael ran the pad of his thumbs over her tear-stained cheeks while staring intensely into her eyes. "I love you, Karen Miller, and I never want you to think otherwise."

She offered him a small smile. "I love you, too, Michael Myers, and you should know by now that I never will."

The killer bent his head and kissed Karen's cheek. By the time he lifted his mouth, they were standing in the upstairs corridor just outside her bedroom door. He dropped his arms to his sides, but the desire in his expression did not go unnoticed. The teenager's body tingled in response, which created an awkward moment between them.

"Well, good night, sweetness," her lover said at last.

"See you in the morning, Michael," she throatily replied.

Karen could feel her fianc 's steady gaze on her even after she closed the door. It wasn't until she entered the bathroom that she sensed his presence finally leave the hallway. Where he had gone she could not say, nor did she give it much thought. Her body still

craved his touch, so in order to prevent a repeat of the night before, she pushed him from her mind and solely concentrated on her nightly tasks.

Once she finished in the bathroom, Karen changed into a pair of pink and orange plaid flannel pajamas and crawled into bed. She snuggled underneath her sheets and comforter. This was when she missed sleeping with Michael. He always kept her warm. _In more ways than one_, her inner voice smirked.

Scowling, the brunette reached for _Pride and Prejudice_. She was so determined not to have another repressed memory resurface that she decided to pass the night by reading. As long as she kept her mind occupied, she knew she could keep the memories of her _dreams_ at bay. She just had to focus on the book and not let her thoughts wander. That was keyâ€"that had always been the key.

Focus. Focus. Focus.

* * *

><p>After her parents left, Dawn had crept into the sunroom. The floor to ceiling windows gave her a perfect view of Lake Michigan, though it was too dark outside to see the picturesque scenery surrounding the mansion. However, she found comfort in the darkness, which was why she hadn't bothered turning on any lamps. She could hide here, and no one would ever be the wiserâ€"no one except for him. She could just make out his dark silhouette in the glass' dim reflection. She didn't know how long he had been standing behind her, but the fact that he was there at all made her palms sweat. Without turning, she softly asked, "Do you hate me?"

"No," came the firm reply.

"Did you tell Karen?"

"No. I saw no reason to involve her in this."

The teenager continued to stare out the window, though Michael's words did ease her nerves somewhat.

After a few silent moments passed, he said, "You crossed a line tonight, Dawn. Why?"

His voice was much closer than before, yet she remained stationary. "I'm not sure," she answered. "I guess I was just curious and confused. I know you and Karen are destined for each other, but I like you, too."

"And did that kiss satisfy your curiosity and confusion?"

Dawn dolefully shook her head. "No."

"That's what I figured."

Suddenly, Michael grabbed Dawn by the shoulders and spun her around so that she was facing him. Then, to her utter astonishment, he lowered his lips onto hers. Her heart pounded loudly in her ears as he boldly slipped his tongue into her mouth. However, as he passionately kissed her, the initial excitement Dawn had experienced

slowly started to fade. She was expecting to feel the same sparks that Mark's kisses always ignited within her, but instead she felt only emptiness and guilt. Michael was Karen's soulmate, not hersâ€”never hers.

Without thinking, Dawn forcefully shoved the killer away, tears now stinging her eyes. "I am such a fool," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Michael surprised her, again, by drawing her into his arms. "No, Dawn, you are a seventeen-year-old girl, who had developed a crush on an older male friend. It happens."

She pressed her cheek into his chest and asked, "So you're not angry?"

"No."

She tilted her face up. "And do you still consider me a friend?"

"Yes, Dawn, a friend," the killer confirmed. "Nothing more, nothing less."

The blonde girl hugged him, feeling as though a weight had been lifted from her very soul. "Thank you, Michael." She, then, released him and took a small step backwards. "I'd better get ready bed now. Otherwise, I'm not going to be worth a damn at school tomorrow."

"Yes, go," he agreed. "Get some sleep. Morning will be here before you know it."

Dawn left the sunroom, grinning to herself. The last half an hour had been quite enlightening. Not only did she obtain a better understanding of hers and Michael's friendship, but she had acquired valuable insight into hers and Mark's relationship as well.

Although she had been infatuated with her uncle's handsome business associate since day one, Dawn now realized that her feelings for him ran a lot deeper than she first thought or cared to admit. She didn't know what she was going to do with this new revelation, but one thing was certain. She was falling in love with Markus VanTroy.

41. October 7, 1997

****Happy Thanksgiving! More chapters are on their way!****

* * *

><p>ONE DAY LATER

****October 7, 1997**

>Waukegan, Illinois

Karen stared down into the glass jewelry case, her eyes drawn to one particular vintage wedding band. It was yellow gold with a round black diamond and two smaller round rubies set in the center of it. "May we please see that one?" she asked Vern, the gray-haired

jeweler.

"Yes, of course." He took the wedding band out of the case and handed it to her.

Karen inspected it and then gave it to Michael, who slipped it on his finger. He studied his hand for a few moments and then looked at her with so much affection in his expression that it actually made her blush. "We'll take it," she told Vern.

"Excellent," he said. "I'm glad you were able to find a ring in our estate section. We resize in-house, so it will be ready for pick up by next Tuesday."

"That will be fine," Michael replied, breaking his silence, "but we need Karen's rings resized as well. They're about a half-size too large."

"All right, let's take a look."

As Karen laid her ring on the glass top, Michael reached into his pocket and pulled out Eleanor's former wedding band, which was yellow gold with seven small black diamonds set in it.

Vern inspected the engagement ring first. "This is a very exquisite ring," he commented.

"Yes, thank you," Karen said. "My friend's great-aunt gave it to me."

"Well, we'll definitely be able to resize both rings," Vern stated after examining the teenager's wedding band, "but they'll be a fee for it, and they won't be ready until next Thursday."

"That's still acceptable," said Michael. "I'll pick up all the rings on Thursday."

"Very good."

Once Vern and Michael completed the sale, the killer escorted Karen outside. She instantly opened her black umbrella in order to shield them from the cold raindrops that were falling from the dark sky. "This is a drink hot cocoa and sit in front of a warm fire kind of day," she said, hugging her mid-length red raincoat closer to her body.

"Yes, except I have other plans for us," Michael informed her.

"Oh?" she inquired. "Like what?"

"Like dance lessons."

Karen stopped dead in her tracks and stared at her fiancÃ©.
"Seriously?"

"Yes. Eleanor made an appointment for us while you were out shopping yesterday."

Karen shook her head in wonderment as she started walking, again. "You're just full of surprises, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes," the killer answered without missing a beat. "I thought it might be something you'd enjoy, especially with the wedding coming up."

"Absolutely. I always thought it would be fun to learn how to dance. I just didn't realize it was something you would want to try."

"I am not opposed to trying new things, Karen, especially if it makes you happy." Michael tenderly kissed the side of her head. "I like seeing you happy."

She smiled at him, wishing they could forgo their no kissing rule just one time.

"Stop looking at me like that," he sternly commanded. "You don't know how badly I want push you into an alleyway and have my way with you."

Karen instantly turned her head, the smile dissolving from her face. She heard her companion sigh softly, but she kept her eyes focused on the sidewalk in front of her. After all, abstaining from sex had been his idea in the first place.

When they reached his green Buick, Karen closed the umbrella while Michael unlocked the car. She set the soaked umbrella on the floor behind her seat. Then, she sat down and simply stared out her window as he drove them to the dance studio.

"This will be good for us," Michael said while they walked into the large building. "It will give us both a chance to release some of our sexual frustrations."

"As long as they don't teach us the Tango," Karen replied, deadpan.

The killer smirked but remained silent as their dance instructors approached them.

"You must be Michael and Karen," a petite brunette woman said.

"Yes," Karen answered.

"I'm Michelle, and my partner here is Brett." She gestured to the auburn-haired man standing next to her. "Are you two all set to start?"

"Yes," said Karen. She shrugged out of her raincoat, leaving behind black jeans and a dark purple blouse.

Michelle smiled. "Excellent. We'll just be going over the basics today..."

* * *

><p>"Well, that was definitely exhilarating," Karen said once she and Michael got settled in his car. "I am exhausted."<p>

"Good," replied Michael. "Then, maybe you'll actually get some sleep

tonight instead of staying up all night reading." He didn't even try to keep the displeasure out of his tone.

"It's important that you deal with your memories, now, Karen," he continued, "because once we're married, we're not going to sleep apart again until either I leave to find Laurie or when we return to Haddonfield so that you can confront your father. I don't know which will come first, but I want to be the one to comfort you, not Dawn or the Helms, and certainly not your father."

Karen looked at the killer and quietly said, "I want that, too, Michael, but I am scared of what I am going to discover through these dreams. Sometimes I think ignorance really is bliss."

"Yes, but if you are planning on making your father truly pay for everything he's done, then don't you think you should know what everything includes?"

"From the parts of my dreams that I do remember, he has done quite enough to justify my vengeance, Michael, and that doesn't even include the initial rape."

"But you also have to remember that you're remembering past events. As horrible as they might be, they have already happened, and you have survived them. That alone is a testament of your strength."

"But what if I find out that I'm not as strong as you so adamantly believe?" Karen asked. "What if I disappoint you?"

Michael pulled over onto the shoulder of the road and put the Buick into park so that he could properly address his fianc  . "Karen, the only way you're going to disappoint me is if you purposely keep avoiding your memories. You need to face your fears. Otherwise, you will never truly defeat your father."

The teenager gazed out her window as she contemplated his words. "All right, Michael," she finally said, meeting his steady gaze. "I will stop avoiding my memories, and I will even let you dry my tears afterwards. However, I'm not promising that I am going to tell you about my memories. My father attacked me in a very personal way, and I'm not sure how much of it I want you to know."

"Fair enough," Michael answered.

"And you have to swear that whatever I decide to tell you stays between us," Karen added.

"You have my word," he solemnly vowed.

She nodded and then returned her gaze to the window.

Michael slid the Buick's gearshift into drive and maneuvered the car back onto the wet asphalt. He trusted that Karen would keep her promise of confronting her repressed memories, which meant she was in for some rough nights. There wasn't much he could do to help her, except offer her a pair of arms to cry in. He just hoped that would be enough.

42. October 10, 1997

****IMPORTANT AUTHOR'S NOTE: Chapter 41 is a new chapter as well! ****

*** * ***

><p>THREE DAYS LATER

****October 10, 1997****

****Waukegan, Illinois****

"All right, man, spill it. What's going on with you?"

Mark blinked, refocusing his gaze on his best friend Jed Peterson, who was sitting next to him at the bar. "Nothing's going on with me," he replied. "I'm just drinking my beer and enjoying your company."

"Bull shit," the yellow-haired man spat. "We've been here an hour and you've barely spoken three words to me. If I had known that you weren't in the mood for company, I would have just driven home to Chicago after my business meeting instead of meeting up with you here."

Mark swirled his beer around in its glass and sighed. "I'm sorry, Jed. It's just been a hell of a week for me, and I have a lot on my mind right now."

"So talk," his friend demanded. "What's going on?"

The raven-haired man gulped down the remainder of his drink and said, "I've met someone."

Jed's indigo eyes instantly lit up with humor. "Well, that's nothing new. You're always sowing your seed in new fields, as it were."

Mark frowned as he absently tapped the bottom of his empty glass against the bar top. "Yes, I know, but this time it's different."

"Different?" asked Jed, clearly intrigued. "How so?"

"She's my boss' niece, who is only seventeen."

"So by different, you actually mean it's complicated."

Mark released another sigh. "You have no fuckin' idea."

"Then, do yourself a favor and just end it," Jed said. "No harm, no foul."

Mark gave his friend a long look.

"Nooo!" Jed gasped.

"Yes," the other confirmed.

"Are you out of your fuckin' mind?!" Jed hissed. "She's a minor for Christ's sake!"

"And her father is a cop," Mark explained, "which is why I can't just end it."

Jed shook his head in disbelief. "Man, you're a spider caught in a fuckin' web."

"Yeah, I know, and that's not even the half of it."

Jed's eyes widened. "Wait, there's more?"

Mark nodded. "For me, yes; for you, no."

"Got it," Jed said. "So, what are you going to about the girl? The more time you spend with her, the more likely it is that you mightâ€" He suddenly stopped midsentence, shook his head, and scoffed.

"That I might what, Jed?" Mark insisted. "Fall in love with her?"

The blonde man blinked and then blinked again. "Oh my god, you haven't, _have_ you?"

Mark smirked. "I've only known her for a week and a half, Jed. Besides, as you pointed out, I've long since given up my romantic ways. I like women to fuck; that's it."

"Prove it."

Now, it was Mark's turn to blink. "Excuse me?"

"Prove. It." Jed turned around in his chair and gestured to a young woman with curly golden hair, who was sitting alone at one of the tables. "She's been eyeing us ever since she got here. Are you game?"

Mark studied the young woman. He had to admit she was attractive. He let his gaze drop from her pretty face to her pert breasts, which were barely contained within her tight black tank top.

"Nice rack, huh?" Jed asked. "So, what do you say? Do you want to get into her pants or not?"

Mark responded by slowly sliding off the bar stool and walking towards the young woman. She instantly offered him a soft seductive smile and patted the seat next to her. He sat down and said, "May I buy you a drink?"

"Only if you have one with me," she smoothly replied.

"Of course."

He waved down a waiter and ordered them both two tall beers.

"So, my name's Heather. What's yours?"

"Markus," he said.

She continued to smile as she leaned into him and slid her hand

suggestively towards his inner thigh.

"Eager little thing, aren't you?" he huffed.

"I'm a girl who knows what she wants. Will you give it to me?" She lightly kissed the underside of his jaw. "Please?"

Mark's breathing hitched. "Where?"

"Well, my apartment's just down the street from here...your friend is welcome, too."

"Oh, you have a roommate?" Mark innocently asked.

Heather laughed sweetly, her large Bambi brown eyes sparkling with humor. "No, it's just me, Markus, but I am very adventurous, if you know what I mean."

The waiter set their beers on the table, and Mark quickly took a swig of his. "Fuck," he muttered.

"That's the idea," Heather said while her slender fingers grazed his manhood. "I can go all night."

Mark suddenly blinked, wondering if this was real or if he had passed out and was dreaming.

"So, will you come over, or not?" Heather smirked at him as his length hardened beneath her light touch.

"Yes, we'll come," he gasped. Heather started stroking him through his dress pants, and he already felt a spot of moisture forming on the inside of the dark fabric.

"Many, many times, I hope," she said, her hand now aggressively pumping his erection.

Mark's legs fell open in submission, and he subtly bucked his hips against her palm, not thinking about anything besides the pleasure.

Heather licked the shell of his ear and whispered, "Come for me, Markus."

With a quiet grunt, he let himself go, reveling in the moment. "Oh, fuck, you really know what you're doing, don't you?" he panted.

Heather nodded. "Yes, and there's nothing that I won't do, so come on, let's get out of here. And don't forget your friend."

Mark rose to his feet, grateful that he was wearing black slacks. He put a wad of money on the table and then walked back to Jed.

"Well, looks like someone had a little fun," the blonde man teased.

"Yes, and there's more to be had, if you're up to it."

"Hell yeah!" Jed exclaimed. "Let's go!"

The two men left the bar with Heather, and all three got into their respective cars with the plan that Mark and Jed would follow Heather back to her apartment. However, as Mark started driving, his thoughts inevitably drifted to Dawn. He never told her that he was exclusively seeing her, so he didn't consider what he had done and was about to do with Heather as cheating. Yes, Dawn was sweet, but within the last few years, it hadn't been his style to commit himself to one woman for an indefinite amount of time. Besides, Dawn was hardly a woman. She was just a seventeen-year-old girl, who had been pushed into adulthood, thanks to him. Yes, the act itself and those following had been consensual, but that didn't change the fact that she was a young immature teenager whose life was filled with nothing but drama.

Maybe you should have thought of that before you fucked her, Mark's inner voice gallingly chided.

Perhaps, that was true, but he hadn't been aware of her full back story when he had slept with her.

And whose fault is that?

All right, so that _was_ his fault. After learning that she was Nathaniel's niece, he should have stayed clear of her. So why the hell hadn't he?

Mark stopped for a red light, giving him even more time to battle his conscious, though why he was even thinking about Dawn right now was beyond him. His thoughts should have been occupied of images of Heather lying naked underneath him, not on how Dawn would feel about it. Why did he care so much?

Because you like her, even you admitted to that.

Only to keep her from finding someone else, he mentally argued. _I enjoy fucking her, and I don't want another man touching her until I'm ready to give her up._

Yet another man almost did.

Stop.

He intended to kill her, too.

I. Said. Stop.

The light turned green, and Mark drove onward, his eyes concentrating on Heather's maroon Toyota. He breathed a sigh of relief when it pulled into a dimly lit parking lot across from a few large apartment buildings. He stepped out of his vehicle and approached the red car.

Don't do this, his conscious warned. _You'll regret it in the morning._

"Not likely," Mark mumbled.

"Excuse me?" Heather asked. "Did you say something?"

He shook his head. "It was nothing important."

She smiled. "Okay, so who's ready for some fun?"

"I am," said Jed without hesitation.

"Yeah, let's go in," Mark agreed. "It's cold out here."

"Oh, trust me, boys; I'll keep you both nice and warm tonight."

Jed grinned as he wrapped his arm around Heather's shoulders. "Just lead the way, beautiful."

Mark lingered behind them as they entered her apartment and glanced back at his car. "Fuck!" he suddenly hissed. "I can't do this."

"What?!" both Jed and Heather exclaimed, turning around.

"Why not?" the former asked.

"Because of Dawn, that's why," Mark said. "I fucking like the girl!"

Heather instantly pulled away from Jed, strode up to Mark, and pressed her palm firmly against the stain on his pants. "But I want you," she pouted, "and I always get what I want."

Mark grabbed her wrist and threw it back at her. "Not this time, Heather," he snapped. He looked at his friend. "I'm sorry, Jed, but I'm going home. Call me when you're in town again."

"Sure," the blonde man said. "Maybe next time I can meet this girl of yours."

Mark shrugged. "If I'm still with her."

Jed smirked. "It sounds like you would be a damn fool to let this one go, and I don't even know the girl."

Mark sighed and said, "I guess we'll just have to see what happens."

"All right, man. Well, no matter what I'll see you later."

"Yes, good-bye, Jed." Mark gave the blonde young woman a curt nod. "Heather."

Mark strode to his Cadillac, feeling good about not getting involved with Heather. It was really Dawn whom he wanted, and in the morning, he planned to tell her just that.

43. October 11, 1997: Part 1

****IMPORTANT AUTHOR'S NOTE: Chapter 41 & 42 are new chapters as well!****

* * *

><p>ONE DAY LATER

**October 11, 1997

>Waukegan, Illinois

Michael Myers walked into Karen's room and sat down on the bed at her waist. His dark eyes stayed trained to her face while his fingers leisurely unbuttoned her pajama top. "You want this tonight, don't you?" he asked. "I can tell, because your tits are hard, just waiting to be touched." He slid his palms over her belly and then up to her chest, spreading her shirt wide open. Then, he unfastened his pants and crawled up on the mattress in order to straddle her torso. He grabbed his erection and guided its thick head over her sensitive nipples.

A soft moan escaped Karen's lips as her body temperature rose. She knew what was coming and was powerless to stop it.

"_I love how you orgasm so easily for me now," Michael said. "I barely have to try."_

He moved his body downward, pulling Karen's pants and underwear down at the same time. Once she was bare, he pressed himself against her, letting her feel his manhood pulsating against her wet center. He bent her knees and pushed her legs up to her belly, completely exposing her.

Michael slid a finger along her folds, and then focused his attention solely on her swollen nub. She was just ready to reach her peak when he suddenly pushed his length inside of her. "I'm going to fuck you now."

And he did, hard and fast. The pleasure was unreal. Karen climaxed several times before he finally released his seed deep into her body. He dropped her legs back onto the mattress, and she fell sound asleep.

However, this time as she slept, she heard voices within the blackness, and she felt her body being manipulated into a variety of compromising positions. Hands and fingers touched her in intimate places, purposely arousing her, while flashes of light periodically lit up the inside of her eyelids.

Karen tried to claw her way out of the darkness, wanting to know what happening, but she was just too tired, and her limbs felt much too heavy.

"_Is she waking up?" an unfamiliar voiced asked._

Even in her sedated state, Karen recognized the voice as being male.

"_No, Jerry, not yet," another male said. "We still have time."_

She knew that voice! It belonged to her father!

So many questions instantly raced through Karen's groggy mind. Why was her father here? Where was Michael? Why wasn't the killer helping her? And who the hell was Jerry?

"_She's strong," the stranger said._

"_Very," her father agreed, "but, fortunately for us, the drug is stronger."_

He rolled Karen onto her back and spread her legs wide open. Using two fingers, he fervently rubbed her taut nub, making it slick with desire and coaxing her into yet another orgasm.

"_See what I mean?" her father asked, chuckling._

"_Fuck, look at her cream for you, David," Jerry said, his voice filled with lustful awe. "That's so fuckin' hot."_

Karen then saw another flash through her eyelids. What the hell was going on?

"_I can't believe you're letting me partake in this with how much you love her and all."_

"_Yes, well, I trust you, Jerry," her father said. "Besides, it's easier to do this when someone else is holding the camera..."_

Mortified, Karen forced herself to wake up, and this time she succeeded. She bolted out of bed and ran blindly into the bathroom. After emptying the contents of her stomach, she collapsed onto the tile floor and cried her heart out.

* * *

><p>A sharp pain in his chest jolted Michael from a deep slumber. He instinctively leapt out of bed and within seconds was inside his lover's bedroom. He immediately heard loud gut-wrenching sobs coming from the bathroom.<p>

Without announcing his presence, he boldly strode into the smaller room. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he was able to see Karen's crumpled form lying on the floor. She was crying so hard that she was beginning to hyperventilate. He dropped to his knees next to her and reached out to touch her. Suddenly, she lifted her head and shrieked, "D-DO! N-NOT! T-TOUCH! M-ME!"

The wild look in Karen's expression told Michael that she was on the verge of hysteria.

She then grabbed the front of his uniform and stared angrily into his eyes. "You a-are my s-soulmate!" she seethed. "You s-should have b-been there! You c-could have s-stopped them!"

There was so much Michael wanted to say, but only one word left his mouth. "_Them?_"

Karen instantly bowed her head, her hard sobs once again filling the room. "My f-father and s-someone named J-Jerry," she cried. "I w-wanted to s-stop them, b-but I w-wasn't strong e-enough. I n-needed you, and y-you weren't t-there. You n-never were t-there..." Her voice trail off, though her weeping continued.

Michael desperately clutched his lover to his chest and buried his face into her hair. "You're right, Karen. I should have been there for you, but I didn't know." A tear trickled down his own cheek as he said, "I never meant to fail you, sweetness. I love you so much."

She moved her hands to fist his hair. "I k-know. I k-know," she muttered.

Michael lost all sense of time as he slowly rocked Karen in his arms. Once her tears subsided, he rose to his feet and carried her back to bed. He laid her down on the mattress and brushed her disheveled hair away from her wide glassy eyes. He had seen the look many times before plastered on his victims' faces. She was terrified.

"Please don't go," Karen mumbled. "I don't want to be alone."

Michael joined her in bed and kissed her pale forehead. "I'm not going anywhere, sweetness," he said. "Now, please try to go back to sleep."

She laid next to him, staring up at the ceiling. Whether she was reminiscing about the past or looking ahead to the future was impossible to say. Eventually, though, her eyelids fluttered shut in sleep.

Michael watched Karen for another hour, his thoughts solely focused on two individuals, David Miller and Jerry. If the cop loved her so much, then why did he allow another man to see, perhaps even touch her?

The killer didn't know the extent of Jerry's involvement and doubted she would ever indulge that kind of personal information with him. However, the fact Jerry was there at all was enough for Michael to justify the man's death.

With that thought in mind, the killer closed his eyes and allowed sleep to reclaim him.

* * *

><p>Dawn was pouring herself a cup of coffee when Michael sauntered into the kitchen. She shook the glass pot at him and asked, "Want some?"<p>

He considered her offer and then gave his head a curt nod. Dawn wasn't sure if he actually needed the caffeine or if he had just agreed to be cordial. Either way she was glad for the company.

"I heard Karen last night," she said, handing Michael a mug full of dark steamy liquid. "It sounds like her nightmares are getting worse."

The killer nodded. "She's remembering more, and her memories are becoming much darker in nature." He sipped his coffee and said, "I'm seriously thinking about sending her to a psychologist."

"Really?" Dawn asked, surprised. "Why?"

"Because, I know she won't tell me everything that has happened to her, and, honestly, it will be best for everyone if she doesn't. However, if she keeps it all to herself, it will eventually destroy herâ€”one way or another."

"I agree with you there, Michael," Dawn said. "I'm just not sure how she'll feel about going to a psychologist."

"I know." He continued to drink his coffee. "I was going to suggest it to her this afternoon during our lunch date."

"That's a good ideaâ€”do it in a public setting, so she can't make a scene."

Michael gave the teenager a wry smile. "My thoughts exactly."

She returned his smile, but it slowly faded from her face as she said, "Mark will be coming over this afternoon while you're gone."

"You look nervous about it," the killer noted.

"I am," Dawn admitted. "He and I have a lot to talk about, and I'm worried that he'll want to do other things besides talk."

"Then, you're going to have to be firm with him, because no relationship will survive without proper communication," Michael said. "I broke over three decades of silence when I spoke to Karen for the first time, and it's just snowballed since."

"I hate to say this, but the situation kind of warranted it, at least as far as Karen was concerned," Dawn replied. "She needed a true boyfriend."

Michael gave the teenager a long look. "As do you, Dawn; just remember that."

"I will. Thanks."

Nodding, he set his empty mug on the counter.

"Oh, is that coffee?"

Both Dawn and Michael turned at the sound of Karen's voice. The former had to hold back a gasp. The brunette's face was deathly pale and her dark eyes, which were unusually sharp and vibrant, were now dull and lifeless. It broke Dawn's heart to see her best friend reduced to such a dismal state. Michael was right. If Karen was ever going to recover from her traumatic past experiences, then she would need to seek professional help.

"Yes. Would you like a cup?" the killer asked, jarring Dawn from her thoughts.

"Please."

"I'll get it," the blonde teenager said, grateful for the distraction. As she turned her attention to the coffee maker, she took a deep breath, fighting back tears.

Meanwhile Michael reached above her head to retrieve a mug from the cupboard. "It will be all right, Dawn," he mumbled just loud enough for her to hear it. He extended the mug so that she could fill it and then walked it over to his fiancÃ©.

"Thanks," Karen said, taking the coffee from his hand. She took a long sip and then moved to sit down at the breakfast bar.

Michael approached her from behind and began messaging her shoulders. She leaned back into his touch and closed her eyes. "I am so tired," she moaned.

"I know, sweetness," he sympathized. "I know."

Dawn observed her friend, suddenly realizing just how vulnerable Karen really was. Dawn's chest constricted, and she knew tears were eminent. She hung her head and scampered out of the kitchen just before the first teardrop fell.

"Dawn...?"

The sound of Mark's voice took her by complete surprise. Stunned, she looked at him through her tears and asked, "What are you doing here? Our date isn't until noon. You're three hours early."

"I know," he said, "but I'm ready to talk now."

Dawn wiped her face with the back of her hand.
"Really?"

"Yes."

"Okay, let's go up to my room. I have a feeling this may take a while."

"That's why I came early."

Dawn offered Mark a small smile. "In this case, that's not a bad thing."

He smirked at her joke and reached for her hand. "At least your sense of humor is still intact."

"Yeah, well, I would go crazy if it wasn't," she honestly told him.

Dawn guided her partner upstairs to her bedroom. Once they sat down on her bed, she said, "So much has happened in the last week and a half. I don't really know where to start."

"Well, most stories start at the beginning," he said.

"Yes, well, I'm going to start this one the night Michael and I left Haddonfield."

Dawn told Mark what she knew about Alexander and Timothy McBride, including David; Michael; and Karen's involvement. Then, she informed him about Michael and Karen's spontaneous engagement; their decision to sleep apart; and Karen's reoccurring flashbacks, which brought them to why Mark had found Dawn in tears earlier that morning.

"I don't know what happened to her, but I could practically feel her pain," Dawn said. "She was hurting so much."

Mark frowned. "She has obviously been through a lot...you all have actually. I really don't know what to say."

Dawn shrugged. "You don't have to say anything, Mark. I just wanted to give you an overview of what's been going on here."

"It's really fucked up," he stated.

"Yeah, I know, but it is what it is, and I'm learning to deal with it. I'm just happy that Karen worked out an arrangement with her father, because now I can begin living a normal life, again."

"Speaking of which, how has school been going for you? It must be tough starting later in the school year."

"It hasn't been too bad," Dawn answered, "but Karen is an excellent tutor. She's very smart and has always excelled in school. I've never been that disciplined."

"It sounds like Karen used school as a coping mechanism."

"Yeah, but I also think she likes being challenged. Michael has agreed to let her go back to school when the time is right."

"He loves Karen a lot," said Mark.

Dawn nodded. "Yeah, he does," she agreed. "What they have is very special. I once found them in the throes of making love, and it was incredible to watch."

Mark blinked. "Wait, you actually watched them?"

Dawn's cheeks turned warm. "Yes. I know it was bad of me to do, but it was so hot. That's what I was thinking about when you caught me masterbating in my uncle's study."

"Yes, I bet that was a sight to behold," Mark said. "No wonder you were so worked up. Did either of them see you?"

"I'm not sure if he saw me, but Michael knew I was there."

Dawn noticed the bulge forming in Mark's jeans and boldly unzipped his fly. "I think we've done enough talking for right now," she said, lowering her head. Mark fisted her hair as she sucked and licked his erection.

"Oh yeah, honey," he groaned. "That feels so good, but this time I want to explode inside of your wet hot pussy. Will you let me?"

"Yes!" Dawn gasped.

Mark looked down at her and said, "You really like it when I talk dirty to you, don't you?"

"Yes," she confessed.

"Why?" he asked. "Does it make you feel naughty?"

She paused in her ministrations and met his gaze. "Very."

"Then, take your pants off, honey, and fuck my hard cock with your soaking pussy until I come."

Dawn did not hesitate to unbutton her jeans and slide them off. She straddled Mark's thighs, moaning as she sat down on his lap and letting him completely fill her. "Why does this feel so good?"

"Because we like each other, honey, that's why," he replied.

"But we're still only fucking."

"Well, right now all you're doing is sitting on me, so technically we aren't doing anything," he joshed.

Smirking, Dawn started bouncing on him. "Better?"

"Much." Mark's hands traveled to her backside and she felt him prod her nether hole with his index finger. She leaned forward, giving him better access to the small opening.

"You are naughty," he said while push his digit into her.

She moaned into his shoulder, quivering as she continued to rock against him. Without warning, he added a second finger. She instinctively ground down on his hardness, causing it to hit a very sensitive spot. "Oh," she breathed.

Mark dug his fingers deeper into her, stretching her even farther. Caught up in the moment, she slipped a hand between them and fervently rubbed her swollen nub. He bent his head and watched as her fingers finally gave her the release she needed.

As she gasped for breath, she felt his manhood twitch inside of her, followed by a gush of warm liquid. She collapsed against his chest and closed her eyes, savoring the moment.

"You're a mess," Mark remarked when Dawn eventually scooted off his lap. He leisurely glided a finger between her lower lips and through the mixture of their bodily fluids. "I think you should take a shower."

She nodded. "Yeah, I agree."

"All right. Let me clean up first. Then, I'll sneak back downstairs and meet you in the library."

Dawn glanced over at her alarm clock and said, "Michael and Karen should be gone by now at least."

"It's not them I'm worried about," Mark answered on his way to the bathroom. "It's everyone else."

Once he closed the door, the teenager grabbed a clean panty from her

dresser while she waited for him. He emerged a few minutes later, looking and smelling refreshed.

"See you again soon," he said as he left the bedroom.

Dawn hurried to the shower and undressed. She didn't want to keep Mark waiting long, so she took a brief shower, not even bothering to wash her hair. Afterward, she dried off, threw her clothes back on, and walked downstairs. As she approached the library, she heard Mark's voice through the door.

"I promise that nothing happened, Nathaniel. Dawn can attest to that. We were just talking."

"That may be," her uncle retorted, "but this is a matter of propriety, Markus. Until she turns eighteen, you are not allowed in her room. Do I make myself clear?"

Dawn flinched at the anger in her uncle's tone.

"Yes, Sir," Mark said.

"Good. Now, I will let you get back to your work."

Dawn quickly ducked behind a corner, successfully avoiding her uncle as he exited the library. Once he disappeared from sight, she joined her partner in the large room. "I'm sorry, Mark," she said. "I didn't mean to get you into trouble."

A look of defiance passed over his features. "You didn't get me into trouble, honey; I did from the moment I laid eyes on you. I should never have touched you that day in your uncle's study, but I couldn't stop myself—I still can't stop myself." He cupped her face in his hands and stared hard into her eyes. "Dawn, I want you and only you."

Her eyes narrowed. "All right," she said, "but for how long? Are we talking about a few weeks, a few months, or even possibly a few years?"

Mark openly gaped at her. "_Years?_" he asked.

She shrugged, though inside she was hardly feeling indifferent about that long-term prospect. "I was just throwing it out there," she told him.

"Dawn, you should know that I don't spend more than a few months with the same woman. I like variety."

She instantly shook her head free from his hold and said, "Really? Because it seems to me like you're scared of commitment. Have you ever allowed yourself to become emotionally attached to a woman? Have you ever been in love?"

"Once," he said, "and, yes, I loved her very, very much. You spoke before of soulmates. Well, Tabitha was mine. I will never forget the pain I felt after I lost her. It's something I never want to experience ever again. That's why I just fuck women now. It's a lot less complicated."

"Okay," said Dawn, "but during our times together, I've indulged some really personal information with you under the guise that you liked me."

"That wasn't a guise, Dawn," growled Mark. "I really do like you."

"So doesn't that mean you're already emotionally attached to me on some level?"

He remained silent.

"Mark..?"

"Yes!" he angrily yelled. "All right?! Yes! Is that what you want to hear?!"

Dawn nodded. "Yes, because now I at least know that when our relationship ends, I won't be the only one hurting."

His jaw visibly clenched as he said, "You say you like me, Dawn, but you don't even know me."

"Okay, so let's talk about you now." Dawn walked to the same sofa that she and Mark had used before, sat down, and looked at him expectantly. "Have you lived in Waukegan your whole life?"

Drawing a deep breath, he took a seat next to her. "No. I was born and raised in Chicago. I left home after high school to go to Yale. After college, I returned to Chicago and landed a job at a respectable firm. I worked there for about three years. Then, your uncle placed an offer on the table that I just couldn't pass up. I've been working with him for nearly five years now."

"What about your parents? Are they still together and living in Chicago?"

Mark smiled fondly. "Yes, they are still happily married and live in the same house I grew up in. I try to visit them at least once a month. My family is very important to me."

Dawn's eyes lit up. "Oh, do have siblings?"

"Yes, I have an older brother and sister and two younger brothers and one younger sister. My older siblings are both married. My brother has two kids and my sister is due with her third in March. One of my younger brothers is also married with one kid, but the rest of us are single, though my younger sister is in a very serious relationship. We're all expecting an engagement announcement soon."

"Since you're an uncle, does that mean you like kids?" asked Dawn.

"I like my nieces and nephews, but unfortunately my older siblings live out of state, so I don't get to see them a lot." Mark paused and then said, "Tabitha and I discussed having kids, but she died before we could make our dreams a reality."

The sadness in Mark's tone brought tears to Dawn's eyes. "Were you engaged to her, then?"

He slowly shook his head. "No, Dawn. Tabitha was my wife." Without missing a beat, he said, "She was killed in a car accident during a blizzard while I was still working at the other firm. We had just gotten married that summer, but she wanted kids in the worst way."

Dawn sat in stunned silence for a few minutes as a few tears slid down her cheeks. Markus VanTroy was a widower. She had no idea how to respond to that other than by saying, "I'm sorry, Mark. That must have been so hard for you. I can't even imagine."

"It was pure hell," he confirmed, "but you don't have to cry for me, Dawn. It happened a while ago now."

She sniffled and shook her head. "Sorry, with everything that has been going on, I've been more emotional than usual lately."

Mark frowned but didn't comment.

"Anyway, I'm glad you shared all of this with me," Dawn said. "Thank you."

He leaned over and placed a chaste kiss on her cheek. "You're welcome."

They continued to sit together, but Dawn could sense that her companion wanted to leave. "Mark, I'll understand if you don't want to stay," she told him.

"In that case, I think I will bow out early. Maybe you can get some rest, then, too." Mark rose to his feet and strode to the door. Dawn followed closely behind him. "I'll see you later, honey."

She put on a brave face, even though on the inside she was screaming for him to stay with her. "I'll be here, Mark," she said.

He gave Dawn's cheek another quick peck and then walked down the corridor, leaving her standing alone in the doorway. Feeling confused and alone, she slowly trekked back upstairs. Instead of going directly to her room, she stopped in front of Eleanor's door and gently tapped on it.

"Come in," answered the voice within.

Dawn opened the door and peered into the bedroom. "If you're resting, I can come by later."

The woman chuckled humorlessly. "I'm always resting, child." She gestured to a chair. "Please, have a seat. What's on your mind?"

Dawn sat down and said, "Mark and I finally talked today, and I learned that he is a widower."

Eleanor's eyes widened. "Oh, that's interesting news indeed."

"Yeah," agreed Dawn. "He really loved his wife, and he hasn't been in a serious relationship since." She paused as her gaze traveled to

Eleanor's wedding portrait. "After Victor died, did you ever consider marrying again?"

The older woman shook her head. "Don't get me wrong, I had my fair share of gentlemen callers; however, I just couldn't see myself marrying any of them. I enjoyed their company, but what I really wanted was my Victor back. He was the love of my life."

"That's how Mark felt about Tabitha. Now he just uses women for sexual release."

"Does that include you?" Eleanor asked.

The teenager gave her head a small shake. "It did, but not anymore. Something between us changed."

"You almost were killed, Dawn. That's what changed," Eleanor said. "Any feelings he harbored for you beforehand would have only increased afterwards. Now, he just has to work through those feelings, which may take awhile, depending on how deep they run. Does that help?"

"Yeah, it does," Dawn replied, standing. "Thanks, Eleanor."

"You're welcome, child."

The teenager quietly left her great-aunt's quarters and walked into her own. With her mind now at ease, she crawled into bed and curled up underneath the blankets where she fell sound asleep.

44. October 11, 1997: Part 2

Karen took a sip of her iced tea as Michael finished his steak. She hadn't spoken a lot during their date. Her thoughts were still running rampant, and she was at a total loss of what to say. She felt so violated by her father that it actually left her speechless.

Throughout the past week, Karen had come to discover that David Miller had erotic tastes when it came to sex, but nothing she had learned had prepared her for the previous night's horrifying revelation. Her stomach churned just thinking about it. She took another sip of her beverage in hopes of reducing the nausea. "I hate him," she mumbled into her bendy straw. "I hate him so much it hurts." She felt Michael's gaze on her, yet she kept her head bowed, knowing that if she met his eyes, she would start crying again.

"Karen, is there anything I can do to help you?" he gently asked.

She shook her head. "No offense, Michael, but I think I'm beyond your help right now."

"Yes, I think so, too," he agreed.

Karen risked looking at him. "So, what do you suggest?"

Michael gave her a long look. "Truthfully, I think you should start

seeing a psychologist," he said. "Otherwise I'm afraid you might never fully heal from this."

Instead of berating his idea, Karen slowly nodded. Michael appeared surprised by her lax reaction. "What?" she questioned. "Were you expecting me to flip out or something?"

He smirked and said, "I should have known better."

"Yes, because I've been acting so emotionally stable lately," Karen added with a role of the eyes. "I'm just grateful for our dance lessons. They're what have been keeping me sane these past few days. I'm going to really miss them once they end."

Michael cocked his head. "Who says they're going to end? I figured we'd continue with them even after the wedding. It will give us something to do during the long winter months."

Karen's eyes widened with excitement. "Really? You'd do that for me?"

"Not just for you," Michael admitted. "I'm enjoying them as well."

Karen stared at the serial killer in utter wonderment. "Who would have thought?" she muttered.

He deliberately nodded. "Yes, who indeed?"

A gentle smile touched Karen's lips. "I love you, Michael."

His facial expression remained solemn, yet his eyes burned with love. "I know." Then, he reached for the check that Courtney had set on their table nearly an hour before.

While Michael slipped some cash into the thin black folder, Karen took one last sip of her drink. "All set?" he asked, standing.

She nodded and also rose to her feet. After helping her with her black woolen peacoat, the killer escorted Karen out of the restaurant.

"Thank you for lunch," she said once they were back on the road. "I always like spending time with you away from the mansion."

"You're certainly welcome, sweetness, and I share your sentiment."

Karen let a few silent moments pass before saying, "I wonder how Dawn's date with Markus is going. He was sure was in a hurry to see her this morning."

Michael nodded. "Perhaps he finally had an epiphany. Dawn may be young and slightly naive, but she is a good person. He'd have to be truly heartless not to fall for her."

Karen leaned over and planted a soft kiss on her companion's cheek. "Michael, that's one of the sweetest things I've ever heard you say, especially about Dawn."

"Yes, well, I care about her a lot," he answered.

"Michael, I'm secure enough in our relationship for you to say that you love her," Karen firmly told him.

He reached for her hand and brought her knuckles to his lips. "Of course you are."

Her breath caught as he kissed her hand, and she instinctively jerked it away from his mouth, returning it to her lap.

"Next time you may want to mind your own lips," he calmly suggested, though the humor in his expression did not go unnoticed.

"Hmm, or maybe we should go back to just holding hands," she replied in jest.

"If you insist."

Karen responded by taking off her seatbelt and nuzzling into Michael's side. He draped an arm around her, his fingers making small circles on her hip bone. Even through her jeans his touch seared her skin. "I am so looking forward to our wedding night," she told him.

He briefly took his eyes off the road to kiss her crown. "As am I, sweetness."

All too soon, Michael turned onto Oakwood Drive. The first thing Karen noticed as he parked alongside her Camero was that Mark's Cadillac was gone.

"Is something wrong?" her fianc  asked.

"No," she said. "I was just expecting Markus to still be here. I hope everything is okay."

"Why don't you go in and check?"

Karen nodded, knowing that she was being dismissed and after glancing downward, she understood why. "All right. I'll fill you in later."

Michael offered her a small smile. "I'm sure you will."

The teenager left the car and walked up to the mansion's front steps. Patrick greeted her at the door. "Welcome back, Miss Miller," he said, taking her coat. "I trust you and Mr. Myers had a good lunch."

"Yes, we did, thank you," she politely replied.

"I'm glad to hear it."

Karen looked around the foyer. "Patrick, do you happen to know where Dawn is?"

"I believe Miss Johnson retired to her quarters."

"Thank you, Patrick."

As Karen turned toward the staircase, the butler asked, "Miss Miller, forgive me, but you look fatigued. Might I suggest that you take the elevator up to the second floor?"

Karen wordlessly nodded and stepped into the lift with Patrick.

"I hope wedding planning isn't the cause of your distress. This is supposed to be an exciting time for you."

"Patrick, please don't patronize me," Karen commanded. "I know you would rather I marry someone else."

"Perhaps so, if someone else existed. However, the truth is, no one is better fitted for you than Michael. You are his perfect match."

"Thank you, Patrick," Karen sincerely said as he opened the elevator's door. "That's very kind of you to say."

"You're welcome," he replied with a smile. "Have a good evening, Miss Miller."

"You, too, Patrick."

Karen strolled down to Dawn's room, her heart feeling a little lighter. She rapped on the door. A few moments later her friend answered, looking uncharacteristically disheveled. "I'm sorry," the brunette apologized. "Did I wake you?"

"Yes, but that's okay," Dawn said while she ushered Karen into the bedroom. "I skipped lunch, so I really should make an appearance at dinner." The blonde teenager sauntered over to her closet and pulled out a simple blue long-sleeved knit dress. "I assume that you're not going to join us."

Karen shook her head. "No, not tonight, Dawn. I'm still very full from lunch."

"And very tired," Dawn added, giving her friend a scrutinizing look. "I wish Michael would move back in with you just so you could get a decent night's sleep. If you keep going like this, you're going to look exhausted on your wedding day. Maybe you should try talking to him about it."

"It won't do any good," Karen said. "He's quite adamant that I face my memories before we are married so I won't be surprised by them later on when he's not around to comfort me."

"But there comes a point when enough is enough." Dawn argued as she undressed. "He set you up for this, you know."

The brunette nodded. "He and Eleanor both did. To be fair, though, I don't think either of them imagined that my father was the monster he's turning out to be."

"Which is all the more reason for Michael to end your suffering." Dawn yanked her dress down over her head. "In my opinion what he's forcing you to endure is teetering on the edge of torture."

The color suddenly drained from Karen's face. "Oh shit," she muttered, running to the bathroom. She flung the door open only to find the smaller room empty.

"Karen, what's wrong?" Dawn asked as she approached the doorway. "Are you sick?"

The brunette slumped against the doorframe, her heart pounding in her ears. "He was here," she breathlessly said.

Dawn pursed her lips together. "For how long?"

Karen shook her head. "I'm not sure. I usually can sense when he's close by, but on occasion, he still manages to surprise me." She anxiously ran a hand through her hair. "He must have been thinking about me and arrived here by accident. It wouldn't be the first time it's happened. I just wonder how much he heard."

"Maybe it's not as bad as you think," Dawn said. "Maybe he didn't linger."

"Maybe," Karen dully replied. Then, she looked at her best friend and sighed. "I'm sorry, Dawn. I came here to ask you how your date went, not to talk about me. I hate to think that I'm turning into a narcissist."

The blonde girl snorted. "Oh please." She strolled back to her closet and slipped on a pair of black heels. "As for my date, the only real news I have to tell you is that Mark is a widower."

Karen's eyes widened. "Whoa. Really?"

"Yeah, and she was his one true love. Ever since she died, he has kept himself emotionally detached from women to avoid feeling that kind of hurt again."

"But then he met you," Karen said knowingly.

Dawn nodded. "I think he wants to start a serious relationship with me, but right now I'm just going to give him the space he needs to figure things out. I'm afraid if I push too hard, I'll end up pushing him away."

Karen moved away from the bathroom's door and gave her friend an encouraging hug. "Don't worry, Dawn. If this morning was any indication, I'm sure he won't be able to stay away from you for long."

"Thanks, Karen."

The two teenagers broke apart and walked out of the room together.

"I'll see you later," Dawn said. "Try to get some rest."

"I'll try," Karen replied, turning towards her quarters. With trepidation, she opened the door, sensing that Michael was inside. Sure enough, he was standing in the center of the room waiting for her. Their eyes locked, but just as she opened her mouth to speak, he raised a hand, silencing her.

"Don't you dare apologize," he sternly commanded. "I heard nothing that I didn't already know. You and Dawn were both right. I did underestimate your father's cruelty, and you have endured enough. I want you to enjoy the days leading up to our wedding and the wedding itself, so I'm going to start living with you again."

Karen dropped her gaze to her feet, her heart constricting tightly in her chest. "I have failed you," she murmured.

"What?" Michael asked, clearly surprised. "No, trust me, Karen you haven't. It's me. I can't bear to see you in this much pain. I'm the one who isn't strong enough. Not you."

The teenager lifted her head, shocked by the killer's earnest confession.

"You are the strongest person I know," he added. "It's a damn shame that you can't yourself as I do."

"Give me some time," Karen retorted. "Although enlightening, these past few days have been extremely difficult for me, especially last night. I never thought my father would involve someone else..." A lump quickly formed in her throat, making talking impossible. Even though she hadn't actually witnessed Jerry touching her, she knew she had felt more than just her father's hands on her body as they had primed it for the camera.

"Karen!"

Michael's raised voice managed to jolt her from her reverie. However, her muscles were so tense that they were beginning to burn. She needed to lie down.

"Come, Karen. You need to rest."

She gasped when her fianc  abruptly swept off her feet and carried her to the bed. Yet, instead of laying her on the mattress, he kept a firm grip on her, almost as though he was debating on how to handle the situation. She shifted forward in his arms just as he bent his head to look at her. In that moment their lips collided, Fate once again interceding on their behalf.

With a low growl, Michael pressed his tongue against the seam of Karen's lips. She didn't hesitate to part them, allowing his tongue entry into her mouth. She wrapped her arms around his neck while he lowered them onto the bed.

Karen was too absorbed in Michael's hungry kisses to notice that he had unzipped their clothes until she felt his erection penetrate her weeping entrance. She was a little disappointed that they had succumbed to their desires, but she knew she needed whatever his body was about to offer her.

As Michael moved inside of Karen, a few beads of sweat formed on his brow, which was quite unusual for him. He normally remained very composed, even while making love. He grunted loudly in her mouth, and she was only left to assume that their coupling was causing him pain. She tried breaking their kiss, but he firmly held her head in place while his mouth continued to devour hers.

Finally, Michael climaxed, taking Karen along with him. She was expecting to start crying like she had done in the past after such intense experiences, yet the tears never came. Instead, a distinct sense of peace washed over her. The killer, however, collapsed next to her on the mattress, looking completely drained. "Michael...?" she asked, worried.

"I'll be fine, sweetness," he weakly assured her. "I just need some sleep."

Karen leaned over her lover and zipped up his coveralls. Then, she nestled into him.

"Are you sorry that we broke our commitment of celibacy?" he questioned, his voice barely above a whisper.

"A little," she admitted, "but I also understand that it was necessary. I just wanted our wedding night to feel special."

"It still will, Karen. I promise." The killer's head sank into his pillow as his body relaxed in slumber. "I...love...you..." he uttered before falling completely silent.

Karen tenderly kissed the underside of his jaw. "I love you, too, Michael," she said, though she suspected her words went unheard. She then closed her eyes for the night, confident in the knowledge that she wouldn't have to confront any more repressed memories—at least for now.

End
file.